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Marxism Today

EDITORIAL COMMENTS

STATEMENTS OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AND POLITICAL COMMITTEE ON THE SITUATION IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

BERT RAMELSON — WORKERS' CONTROL? POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITATIONS

EDMUND & RUTH FROW — EDUCATING MARXISTS

DISCUSSION:

DESMOND GREAVES, ALAN SPENCE — THE NATIONAL PROBLEM IN BRITAIN

WILLIAM MENNELL — GOLD AND INFLATION

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Marxism Today

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Editorial Comments

WE print in this issue of *Marxism Today* on pp. 294—296 the Statement of the Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain of August 24th and of the Political Committee of August 27th.

We fully support these Statements which deplored the military intervention in Czechoslovakia by troops of the Soviet Union, Hungary, Poland and the German Democratic Republic, an intervention which has been shown to have had no support from any leading body in the Czechoslovak Communist Party nor in the Czechoslovak State, but which, on the contrary, was opposed by the overwhelming majority of the Czechoslovak people.

We support too the declaration in these Statements of solidarity with the Czechoslovak Party and Government. We welcome the Moscow Agreement as an important first step towards resolving the crisis that resulted from the intervention, but, in our opinion, the real solution of this crisis demands the complete freedom for the Czechoslovak Communist Party and Government to fulfil their functions without outside interference and to be fully responsible for their own affairs, leading to the withdrawal of the foreign troops.

Only in this way can there be a real normalisation of the situation in Czechoslovakia and in the world communist movement.

Socialism Strengthened by Czechoslavak Communist Party

In the July issue of *Marxism Today* we printed important sections (about half in all) of the Action Programme of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, adopted on April 5th, 1968, at the Plenary Session of the Central Committee.

We did not have the space to include more than a brief part of the first section, which dealt with the events in Czechoslovakia which led up to the important measures of renovation taken in January of this year.

This Programme did not, as has in some places been maintained, seek to belittle the important progress—economic and social—made in 20 years of Czechoslovak Socialism. It recognised quite clearly the achievements of the development of socialist economy, nationalisation, industrialisation, the progress of science and education. "Basic socialist social changes," it said, "have been accomplished and the socialist order has sunk its roots deeply and firmly into our land."

But it showed at the same time how distortions and grave errors—like bureaucracy, suppression of democratic rights, misuse and abuse of political power, unjust arrests and trials—had begun to undermine the popular support for the Government and Party, to weaken popular initiative, and to alienate the youth from socialism.

It was these grave errors and deprivations that were above all endangering socialism in Czechoslovakia and weakening Czechoslovakia as a member of the community of socialist countries.

The reforms initiated in January on the other hand were imperative to save Socialism in Czechoslovakia, and their implementation, difficult though this was, was beginning, step by step, to restore the confidence of the Czechoslovak working class and people in Socialism, to rally the working people and the youth around the Communist Party, and to make Czechoslovakia a really secure and strong centre of European and world socialism.

Indeed the carrying out of the process of renovation, far from strengthening reaction, was attracting considerable new forces, particularly of the youth all over the world, to the cause and ideas of Communism.

Dangers Frankly Faced

Of course, whenever and wherever there have been grave errors, particularly in the abuse of democracy and socialist legality, there are always problems and dangers when these are being faced and overcome.

Reaction at home and abroad tries to profit, to make use of the situation for its own ends, and Czechoslovakia was no exception.

Abroad, particularly in Western Germany, imperialism began to look for opportunities to spread its influence, and imperialism generally looked for and tried to stir up suspicions and divisions between Czechoslovakia and other socialist countries.

Inside Czechoslovakia various right wing elements began to be more active.

But the Czechoslovak Communist Party, which after January 1968 was daily increasing its unity and its support from the people, was from the outset very conscious of the aims of imperialism and reaction, confident in its capacity to defeat them, and, in our opinion, fully capable of doing so.

It is instructive to read again the speech of Comrade Dubcek at the meeting of the Central

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Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia which was held from May 29th—June 1st, and the Resolution which was passed there.

The task of restoring confidence in socialism, Dubcek explained, was not an easy one. The many years of administrative methods of work had to an extent paralysed the Party's capacity of action. He frankly noted an "intensification of anti-communist tendencies," warned against the activities of certain organisations like the K231, and, very strongly, against any efforts to spread in Czechoslovakia anti-Soviet ideas.

He made it quite clear that the Czechoslovak Party and Government would not permit this. "We shall resolutely and publicly," he declared, "expose all anti-communist tendencies, politically isolate their bearers and intentions which represent the greatest danger for undisturbed socialist development and the process of socialist regeneration."

He made it clear, too, that the full authority of the Party would be used to defend any honest Party members and officials who might come under unjustified attack.

He spoke with particular emphasis of the importance of strengthening the Czechoslovak socialist state, including the armed forces and their combat efficiency and the security organisations. He stressed the important role of the People's Militia and the need for a strengthened Party role in the mass media.

Measures were taken along all these lines, and, precisely to strengthen the Communist Party's role in all aspects of the life of the nation, and its leadership of the whole process of renovation of socialist democracy, the Central Committee meeting of May-June decided to bring forward the date of the 14th Party Congress to September 9th.

The Resolution adopted put first amongst the Party's tasks in the pre-Congress period:

> "to ensure political leadership of society by the Communist Party, and to repel effectively all attempts aimed at discrediting the Party as a whole, attempts to create distrust in the Party and to deny it the moral and political right to lead our society, to be the decisive political force of socialist power."

Solidarity with the Czechoslovak Party

The military intervention of the five Socialist countries seems to us totally unwarranted, a tragic mistake.

It makes much harder the tasks which the Czechoslovak Party and Government had to take to renovate socialist democracy in Czechoslovakia, tasks which, despite inevitable difficulties, they were successfully fulfilling.

If anyone had any doubt of the degree to which the Czechoslovak Communist Party and its leaders had, since January 1968, gained the capacity to rally around themselves the mass of the people, including the youth, the answer was given by the amazing courage, calm, discipline and unity demonstrated by the whole people, and their unbounded support for the Communist Party and the Government in the complex and difficult days since August 20th.

Many deep problems of Marxism and socialist understanding have been raised by the recent events in Czechoslovakia. We shall in *Marxism Today* initiate discussion on some of the most essential of these problems like the relations between socialist countries and Communist Parties, questions of proletarian internationalism, and, above all, problems of the relations between democracy and socialism.

We cannot understand why some critics of the Czechoslovak Communists have seen fit to attack them for coupling the words—*socialist* and *democracy*. That socialism and democracy must go together, that the fight for democracy is an integral part of the fight for socialism, that socialism must see a vast quantitative and qualitative advance of democracy over the most advanced (but inevitably restricted) capitalist democracy, seems to us one of the most essential conceptions of Marxism-Leninism.

We wish the Czechoslovak Communist Party every possible success and express to them our deep solidarity in the complex, difficult task of advancing along the road they have taken since the beginning of this year.

"*Free for All?*"

As is known the Government Incomes Policy, enforced by legislation sustained a shattering defeat at the TUC at Blackpool, while the voluntary incomes policy just scraped through. A number of middle of the road unions apparently felt that they would be left "naked amongst the wolves" if there was not a voluntary TUC policy to defend them.

Some queer expressions were heard in the debate most of them borrowed from the ideology of the Government incomes policy. It was argued for example that the unions could not go back to a "free for all." One would imagine that there was some wild wage scramble operated in the past which wreaked havoc with the workers' wages and that it was quite impossible to go back to that dreadful situation and however much we disliked Government policy, we had to have some policy in restraint of wages and the TUC policy would just about fill the bill.

In fact there was no wild chaotic situation prior to the introduction of incomes policy by the Tories in 1961—the notorious standstill on wage increases by Selwyn Lloyd then—and the subse-

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quent implementation of the Labour incomes policy from 1965 onwards. It was then that the opposition to Government wages policy commenced to grow and millions of Labour supporters began to abstain from voting at by-elections and local elections. Yet it is the period before the application of Tory and Labour incomes policies that appears in the minds of some trade unionists as "chaotic" and not the period of actual chaos which was the logical consequence of the Labour government's rigorous application of incomes policies.

Another strange set of arguments for the TUC voluntary incomes policy is contained in a resolution put by the National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers which says of that policy:

> "Such a policy is the only feasible alternative to growing legislative interference in the field of wage negotiations and the fairest and most effective way of removing the anomalies and injustices inherent in our wages structures."

Now believe it or not, the removal of all the injustices inherent in the wage structure of all British industries is a task completely outside the scope of ten TUC's, nor has that body as far as we know, claimed that it knows the way to do this grandiose job.

Wage levels under collective bargaining are fixed broadly by the strength of organisation of the workers in any particular industry, and by the demands for labour as a whole.

The idea that the TUC or any other organisation can advance any particular group of workers up the scale of wage payments and demote another grade of workers is complete nonsense. It is one thing for the TUC to help certain categories of the lowest paid workers, at a certain time and place, or to help establish a statutory minimum wage, and quite another for the TUC even to attempt to fix a basis for the wages of every broad category of worker throughout British industry. For that, and nothing less is meant by the demand that it should seek "the fairest and most effective way of removing the anomalies and injustices inherent in our wages structures."

It is asked not only to help remove "the anomalies and injustices" between workers in one particular industry but between those in one industry and another. And how, dear Dyers and Bleachers, can this be done by collective bargaining?

Why Voluntary Policy

The real basis of the TUC's voluntary incomes policy when first formulated was that it would demonstrate to the Government that a state controlled prices and incomes policy would be unnecessary; that a TUC voluntary incomes policy could, given time, do the job of moderating wage demands. The Government countered with the assertion that only a water-tight compulsory policy could do the job but that the fact that the TUC wanted some kind of wages policy justified the Government in all it was doing. In fact, instead of providing a substitute for a Government incomes policy the TUC actually provided for a brief moment a shot in the arm for the Government's wages policy.

When the economic review of the TUC for 1969 is published the Incomes Policy will have been in existence for four years. Perhaps we will be given a glimpse of the over-all results.

Maybe we will be told what results has Government incomes policy obtained, if any.

What results the economic policy has achieved in raising productivity.

Whether Britain is improving or deteriorating in relation to other capitalist countries since this incomes policy started.

This would give trade unionists an illustration of whether this policy has done anything other than bring disaster in its train. But will they dare make it?

Incidentally we wonder what is being taught with regard to wages theory in the full-time courses at the TUC Training College.

We do not notice any courses in wages theory. Is the Trade Union Movement so well equipped that it feels it can dispense with this? Not if the speeches of those supporting the TUC voluntary wages policy, is an adequate guide.

The Royal Commission

The heavy vote against legislative interference with wage negotiations raises the question of what the attitude of the Congress is likely to be to those sections of the Report of the Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers Organisations that the Government is likely to support.

This is particularly the case with the proposed Commission for Industrial Relations whose purpose is to induce, or pressurise, or compel the unions to support new methods of comprehensive workshop bargaining, and a gradual weakening of national wage negotiations.

While the Royal Commission is loud in its advocacy of voluntary agreements on trade reorganisation, it makes no secret of its intention of forcing through certain changes, even if legal compulsion is to be applied. On the other hand, the TUC has made no secret of the fact that it wants the Commission on Industrial Relations to resort mainly to persuasion and would not favour the resort to compulsion. Both Government and Trade Union General Council are manoeuvring cautiously. Neither wants to apply compulsion openly at this stage, yet it is difficult to see how changes in the

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unions can be brought about voluntarily in the teeth of working class resistance.

At the TUC at Brighton Mr. Woodcock praised a Commission on Industrial Relations operating by methods of cautious persuasion. Most unions will note however that the Incomes policy was to operate by the same methods, but the Government quickly began to operate by the method of compulsion. This was its strategy in respect of the introduction of legislative compulsion in relation to the Prices and Incomes Act. It could be its strategy in relation to the implementation of the Royal Commission report.

The General Council of the TUC continues to preach the voluntary principle in regard to Prices and Incomes policy, but the Government continues to practice compulsion. The Trade Union movement must not allow the General Council to operate a similar devious policy in relation to the implementation of the Royal Commission's Report.

Anti-Marx

Attempted counter-offensives to the spectacular growth of interest in Marx and Marxism in all countries which is such a feature of our time are more or less inevitable.

"*Marx*" by Robert Payne (W. H. Allen, 70/-), although intended as a colossal exercise in the destruction of Marxism and of the "image" of Marx personally, is therefore really a testimony to the continuing influence of Marx 150 years after his birth, 100 years after the publication of *Capital* (Vol. I). For it is precisely this influence and the political action, the revolutionary class struggle, the world wide communist movement, to which it has given rise, which the capitalists have always hated and feared.

Hence the constant efforts to refute Marxism, to cast doubt on its basic principles, above all to deny its validity for understanding contemporary political and social problems. Such efforts have varied from those of scholars, from Bohm-Bawerk to Karl Popper, to the frankly cold war approach of Carew Hunt in his *Marxism Past and Present*. But Payne's book represents a new low in the anti-Marx industry, another exercise in character assassination.

The book is sub-titled a "Biography." No-one denies a biographer the right to an attitude to his subject, but Payne is inspired from the outset with such a hatred of Marx and Marxism that the whole vast work (582 pages) becomes an illiterate, tendentious misrepresentation, a large, ponderous squib of unimaginable dampness.

Every aspect of Marx's work is interpreted in terms of Marx's Machiavellian wickedness ("This [Weitling] was the man Marx decided to destroy," p. 133., "Marx was not a man to regard an oath as binding," p. 152. "Marx lived quietly in London . . . pulling strings, embarking on a thousand intrigues," p. 373, etc. etc.).

Every bit of gossip, every rumour and slander which has accumulated around Marx over the years, every pole of Marx's personal life which might be used to discredit him and, through him, Marxism, is to be found in this book. The story that Marx seduced Helene Demuth, the servant who became a member of the family, and was the father of an illegitimate child by her, is regaled with the greatest gusto. So, despite much readable description of Marx's early life and later sufferings and tribulations, the picture that emerges is that of Marx as the supreme egotist, the brutal suppressor of all opposition, the heartless exploiter of his friends, the lover of bourgeois comforts, above all, that of Marx the paper revolutionary.

Mr. Payne contrives to try to win all ways. For when he quotes intimate friends of Marx who give a totally different picture, he implies that this just shows how wicked a deceiver Marx was. He fooled his friends by his good behaviour, and only revealed his true character to others.

Marx, though a very great man, was human like the rest of us, and had his failings. He did not suffer fools gladly, but the evidence of the men who knew him personally and wrote their impressions, add up to a complete refutation of Mr. Payne's picture of him and stamp it as an absolute travesty.

So besotted is Mr. Payne with his anti-Marxism, that his judgements on Marx's writings and on Marxist theory—superficial in the extreme—(as in his "analysis" of the *Communist Manifesto* where Marx's explanation of the nature of capitalist economic crisis is described as "unconvincing," and the famous passage, "what the bourgeoisie therefore produces above all is its own grave-diggers," is amazingly interpreted as leaving "little scope for the proletariat, which is reduced to the role of chief mourner without a suggestion of having vanquished the enemy," p. 169), and on Marx's practical, political activity, degenerate into sheer, ludicrous assertions.

The International

To give one outstanding example, typical of very many, Payne's evaluation of Marx's role in the foundation of the International Working Men's Association, the First International, 1864-1872. Marx ". . . contrived to write the Charter, draw up the rules, appoint his own delegates to the General Council and . . . as far as possible, dictate the subjects to be discussed." (p. 367).

"In the eyes of Marx the International was a

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revolutionary, secret society preparing to take over the Governments of Europe," p. 373.

Every single statement here is a thousand times wrong. The members of the General Council were elected at the foundation meeting, at which Marx played only a minor role, and were added to later by co-option. They represented many diverse and conflicting political trends and could not agree on a common programme. The task of drawing up such a programme was referred to a small sub-committee, of which Marx was a member, by the General Council. Marx offered to embody the conflicting ideas in previous drafts into a new draft.

His draft—the famous *Inaugural Address* was inevitably a much superior document than its predecessors. It was "remarkable from a literary as from a political point of view," (*Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement*, Collins & Abramsky, p. 44) and was accepted first by the sub-committee, and then by the General Council. Only those totally ignorant of the way the International functioned, the heterogenous political outlooks of the different national groupings of which it was made up, or that Marx most violently opposed a proposal for the centralised control of the European Labour Movement by the International, will believe the stuff and nonsense about Marx dictating to the International or wanting to it be a secret society aimed at taking over the Governments of Europe.

Of course Marx had a political point of view, which he tried to get the International to accept. So did others. But his outstanding position in the International was due not to underhand conspiracy, but to the respect which his great contributions inspired.

Mr. Payne has gathered thousands of facts about Marx and appears to have read something of what Marx wrote. But it is all too clear that he has understood nothing whatever about Marx and Marxism.

In the nature of things it is certain that there will be more books attacking Marx and Marxism. While everything is possible, it is unlikely that there will be a worse one than this.

Nigeria and Biafra

Writing early in September it seems clear that the Federal armed forces in Nigeria will have inflicted a serious defeat on what remains of Biafra before the end of the month. This will not be the end. Bearing in mind all the events in Nigeria during the past three years, there can be no doubt that the remaining Biafrans will wage a guerrilla war of resistance for a long time to come.

Taking the casualties of both sides, it is estimated that over 150,000 have been killed in the internal military conflict which has been waged since July 1967. Even more tragic is the far greater loss of life from famine and disease inflicted upon innocent civilians, mainly women and children.

The consequences of this disastrous conflict have made a big emotional impact in Britain. The British Government is guilty of giving support to the United States war of aggression in Vietnam, but is not directly involved in the military sense. In the war against Biafra it has given direct military aid to the Nigerian federal armed forces, and is guilty of complicity in placing obstacles in the way of food and drugs being sent to hundreds of thousands starving and dying from famine and disease.

Four independent African countries—Tanzania, Gabon, Ivory Coast, and Zambia—have recognised the justice of the Biafran case. France also sent arms to the Federal rulers, but in July refused to send any more. On the other hand, Biafra has been supplied all along with arms from Portugal and West Germany, while the United States has refused to send arms to either side—though arms from the United States are going to Biafra through private channels.

Though the situation is extremely complicated the Communist Party in Britain has made its position clear from the outset. Whatever the causes of the military conflict it has urged (a) an unconditional cease-fire on both sides, (b) no outside intervention in support of either side, and (c) peaceful negotiations to reach a settlement. A fuller statement on these lines was published on May 17th in the *Morning Star*.

The whole problem has been examined in the current bi-monthly International Bulletin, produced by the International Department of the Communist Party. It is the 12th Bulletin (Vol. 3, No. 2) in a series which commenced in April 1966. Copies are available from the Department at 2/- each, or an annual subscription (post free) for a series of five issues.

The Bulletin gives a comprehensive analysis of the impact of British strategy in Nigeria, the long-standing internal conflict in this vast country, and the main factors which have led to the present disastrous situation. It is an invaluable document for all those who seek to understand what has led to the present conflict.

Studies of British Labour History

We are proposing in the forthcoming issues of *Marxism Today* to publish a series of original studies of aspects of British Labour history with special emphasis on periods and struggles in particular localities.

One of these, by Ruth and Edmund Frow, is a study of the early days of the Plebs League in North-West England, we have published under the title of *Educating Marxists* in this issue.

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John Foster, now a lecturer at Strathclyde University, has studied the organisations and struggles and outlook of the workers of Oldham from the beginning of the nineteenth century until the 1860's. He discusses (under the title of *Revolutionaries in Oldham*) the rise and decline of class-consciousness. "During the earlier decades of the century Oldham workers," he writes, "had been remarkable for their class solidarity and class consciousness in nearly all the senses in what a Marxist would use the phrase today . . . By the 1860's hardly a trace of the proletarian unity remained." He examines the reason for this radical change of outlook, which is all the more important as it was not at all untypical of developments on a much wider scale.

Peter Wyncoll, who is researching at Hull University, and who has already published a short study of Nottingham Chartism,[4] will be writing on *The International Working Men's Association and Working Class Activity in Nottingham 1871-73*. This is an important study as little is generally known about the extent of the organisation of the First International in the industrial centres of Britain. The article contains much interesting material on the leaders of the Nottingham Branch of the International, particularly on Thomas Smith (one of the most original political thinkers among the English members of the International), who corresponded with Marx, collected for the Commune Refugees, wrote *Letters on the Commune*, polemised with Mill on the laws of historical development, and was one of the founders of the Nottingham Branch.

When discussion arises on the early days of the Shop Stewards Movement and of the great shop stewards' struggles in World War I, many think primarily of the Clydeside; some know of the movement in Sheffield or in South Wales. But it was much more widely extended. And one of the articles in our series will be a detailed study by Ken Biggs on *Coventry and the Shop Stewards' Movement, 1917*, based on the study of the local press, trade union minutes, and discussions with those who participated.

Though of a different character, we shall also publish in the series, under the title of *Can Work be a Free Creative Activity?*, a study by Barrie Stacey on William Morris's view of work in industrial society. We also hope to publish part of an autobiographical work by Mick Jenkins, dealing in particular with the great textile struggles at the end of the 20s and the beginning of the 30s.

These are the articles that have so far been written or are definitely planned, but we would very much welcome from our readers suggestions for other articles in the series, and for possible authors.

[4] Peter Wyncoll: *Nottingham Chartism*, Nottingham Trades Council, 1966.

Documents on the Czechoslovak Situation

(1) Statement of the Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain

The following statement was issued by the EC of the CPGB on August 24th, 1968.

MEETING in London on Saturday, August 24th, the National Executive Committee of the Communist Party issued the following statement:

The Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain deeply deplores the military intervention in Czechoslovakia on Tuesday, August 20th, by troops of the Soviet Union, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria and the German Democratic Republic.

We endorse the statement issued by the Political Committee on August 21st to this effect, which was in accordance with the position adopted at the July meeting of the EC. We then expressed our solidarity with the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and said that:

". . . any actual intervention would only play into the hands of anti-socialists and anti-Soviet forces in Czechoslovakia and give them the opportunity to play on nationalist feelings so as to stir up opposition to the leadership of the Czechoslovak Communist Party and to the Soviet Union."

The military intervention which took place had no support from any leading body in the Czechoslovak Communist Party or state and is opposed by them. No grounds have been brought forward

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that can justify this violation of the national sovereignty of the Czechoslovak people and Government.

Equally deplorable is the intervention from outside the country to remove some of the leaders of the Czechoslovak Communist Party and to prevent them carrying out their duties, less than three weeks before the Party Congress was due to open on September 9th. This is a gross violation of the democratic rights of the Czechoslovak Communists.

All Communists and other progressive people are deeply concerned about the security of the socialist countries, and the permanent threat which they face from the imperialist powers, and know how justified are their fears. The Soviet Union lost 20 million of its peoples in the war against fascism and carries the major burden of defence of the socialist system against the growing threat of West German imperialism and US aggression throughout the world.

But the prerequisite for the defence of the socialist system against the imperialists is voluntary and mutual co-operation between socialist states and Communist Parties, based on national sovereignty and the independence of each Party and Government.

The Czechoslovak Communist Party faced difficult tasks in the process of correcting the wrong policies of the past and in carrying through the Action Programme adopted by its Central Committee in March. They were aware of the dangers from forces hostile to socialism and conservative elements and were taking steps to deal with them.

If any of the Parties who took part in the Bratislava meeting, only 17 days before the military intervention, were not satisfied with the steps being taken by the Czechoslovak Communist Party, or saw new dangers arising, there should have been further discussion and not military intervention. If such dangers had arisen, this was a matter for the Czechoslovak Party to decide what to do.

The Tories, right-wing Labour leaders and reactionaries throughout the world are using this situation to stoke up the cold war, justify military expenditure and to strengthen NATO.

We Communists completely reject this campaign and will fight against all efforts to whip up the cold war.

We approach the question of the events in Czechoslovakia on the basis of Communist principles and the need to defend and extend the socialist system. It is from this standpoint we regard the military intervention as a tragic error.

The Communist Party of Great Britain reaffirms its solidarity with the Czechoslovak Communist Party. It will continue to promote working-class internationalism and the closest fraternal relations with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the Communist Parties of other socialist countries and those in the capitalist and developing countries. These relations must be based on the principles of equality, sovereignty, non-interference and the discussion of differences. Interference by a socialist country in the internal affairs of another socialist country cannot be justified.

It is absolutely essential that agreement is reached for the immediate withdrawal of the troops from Czechoslovakia and we call upon the five Governments concerned to act at once to ensure that this is done. All restrictions on the elected leaders of the Czechoslovak Communist Party and Government must be ended immediately so that they can carry out their normal responsibilities.

We ask District Committees and branches of the Communist Party to organise public meetings and sales of the *Morning Star* to explain the situation and to intensify our campaigns to end US aggression in Vietnam, against the wage freeze and on other issues affecting the lives of the people.

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(2) Statement of the Political Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain

The following statement was issued by the Political Committee of the CPGB on August 27th, 1968.

THE agreement reached between the Party and Government leaders of Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union is an important first step towards resolving the recent grave crisis.

No one will be under any illusions about the difficulties created by the intervention, which have still to be overcome.

We have constantly maintained that the way to settle differences is through discussion and the search for mutually acceptable political solutions.

This could only be done with the legal Government of Czechoslovakia and the elected leadership of the Czechoslovak Communist Party.

At our Executive Committee meeting on Saturday we said that for any solution to be reached, the normal functioning of the Czechoslovak Government and the Czechoslovak Communist Party had to be restored and the troops withdrawn.

It would appear that these three essential points have been largely agreed to in principle.

We express the hope that the basis has been laid for the rapid normalisation of life in Czechoslovakia.

We wish the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia success in carrying out its programme and in strengthening Socialism and defeating the anti-Socialist forces in its country.

We look forward to the steady overcoming of the problems between the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and other Socialist states, since the defence of the Socialist system depends upon their unity and voluntary co-operation.

We need the utmost unity of all progressive forces, all Socialist states and the fullest co-operation between the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and all other Communist Parties, in order to defeat the aims of West German imperialism and end US aggression in Vietnam.

We will work to unite all Left forces in Britain for those ends.

Workers' Control?

Possibilities and Limitations

Bert Ramelson

INDUSTRIAL democracy has in recent years become a lively topic for discussion. The debate is not confined, as is sometimes thought, to fringe extremist groups.

The TUC devoted considerable space in its evidence to this subject and the Royal Commission itself found it necessary to refer in its Report to this theme.

The Labour Party set up a working party which produced a Report dealing with industrial democracy which formed the basis of a statement to be submitted to this year's Labour Party Conference at Blackpool.

The number of resolutions on the agendas of the TUC and LP conferences, the growing response of shop stewards and rank and file workers to conferences concerned to discuss industrial democracy and the increasing interest in the subject shown by the more serious organs of the Establishment such as *The Times*, *The Financial Times*, and *The Economist*, are all indications of the widespread interest in and the growing importance of this vital aspect of industrial relations.

But that is not to say that there is common agreement on either the relevance or even the content of the subject under discussion.

On the contrary. The diversity in terminology used to describe the theme—workers' control, workers' participation, joint consultation, involvement, social accountability, self-management, encroachment—is an indication of the diversity in conception, as well as motivation of the growing number of participants, at the various levels of discussion on this theme.

It is also a fairly good measure of the confusion and illusions that are being sown, of the utopian as well as downright class collaborationary and diversionary ideas that surround this subject.

The purpose of this article is threefold. Firstly, briefly to examine why it is that the question of

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industrial democracy has emerged as a focal issue in the field of industrial relations to the extent that it has in the 1960s.

Secondly, to indicate why there are great possibilities for extending industrial democracy and in what direction; while at the same time facing up to the considerable limitations to a full flowering of industrial democracy—falling far short of what can be described as workers' control if words are to have any meaning at all—within the framework of a capitalist society. And thirdly to examine the means most likely to effect the widest possible expansion of the worker's right to influence the environment in which he works.

It is no accident that the question of industrial democracy should have emerged as a major issue within the organised TU movement in recent years. There are very good objective reasons for this to have happened.

Effects of Technological Change

One of the facts of life is that we are living in a period of tremendous technological change. The industrial revolution which gave birth to modern industry in its day brought about tremendous changes in the working conditions and industrial relations of man. The technological and scientific revolution through which we are living is of even greater magnitude and significance. It is, therefore, not really surprising that it has made a great impact on all aspects of society but, particularly so, on the economic and industrial life of the country.

It has created the possibilities for unprecedented vast increases in output with a considerably reduced labour force. Under the new techniques the trend is for output to be determined more and more by the character and speed of the machine and equipment and less and less by the workers' effort.

To exploit the new potentialities to the full requires vast capital investment as well as enhanced market outlets. This is undoubtedly an important factor in the acceleration of the natural process of concentration and centralisation of capital. The recent spurt of mergers and take-overs, often with the financial help and exertion of pressures by the state, is an example of it.

These technological developments revolutionising the technique of production cannot but lead to a drive for important changes in working conditions.

The workers are faced with relentless pressures of change aggravating the sense of insecurity, and putting in jeopardy the measure of stability of work enrivonment achieved over the years.

Large scale redundancy, round the clock working, blurring of craft, mobility, job evaluation, measured day work, manning scales, if not new, certainly assume much greater significance and exert tremendous pressures for radical alteration of working conditions.

Many of these changes derive directly from the changes in production methods, the scale of investment and the drive to recoup the vast costs of modern plant before they become obsolete.

These are the objective circumstances which compel the organised workers to demand a say on many aspects of production including investment policy which were hitherto, if only tacitly, left to management. This is not to say that until recently there was a total absence of any desire or movement for the extension of industrial democracy.

Influencing the Conditions of Work

Man has always wanted to play a part in shaping his environment. And as he spends the major part of his life at work, this extended to a yearning to influence the conditions governing his working life.

The founding and developing of the trades unions against all the obstacles was an expression of this need. It was this realisation, that only by the collective effort of the work group (eventually developed to combined effort on a national level) would it be possible to confront the employer with a realisable demand that the workers' needs and aspirations must be taken into consideration in determining some aspects of working conditions, that is the basis of trade unionism. But the field was in the main limited to wage determination, later extended to the length of the working day, working week and a few other elementary conditions of work.

Much later there developed a movement amongst advanced sections of workers for the extension of workers' rights to determining the whole process of production. This movement, rooted in syndicalism and guild socialism, came to the fore during the first quarter of this century before scientific socialism, coupled with the experience of the 1917 Revolution, captured the imagination of the militant section which formed the core of the syndicalist trend, and led them to a realisation that political action is the means to achieve this—with many of them playing a part in founding the Communist Party.

The literature of this early movement is very valuable so long as it is studied in its context, so long as it is understood that the ideas expressed there are as relevant to today's problems and possibilities as the writings of the utopian socialists are to the modern problems of bringing about the revolutionary transformation of society.

But objective necessity by itself is insufficient to explain the emergence of the widespread interest and struggle to extend the field over which the trade unions should have a say.

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Confidence in Trade Union Struggle

What is of equal importance is that the possibilities of achieving this objective should not only exist but be seen to exist.

There can be no doubt that the confidence of trade unions and trade unionists is considerably greater now than at any time since the birth of modern trade unionism.

Conditions of relative full employment during and since the war, the political effects of the anti-fascist war, the extensive development of workplace organisations (the shop stewards movement) have all combined to create in an all round sense, a very much stronger and militant trades union movement raising the confidence of organised workers that a readiness to struggle will yield concessions.

It is thus the coincidence in time of technological changes, creating a need to extend the sphere of workers' influence and the development of a trade union movement capable of demanding the satisfaction of this need, which constitute the combination of circumstances giving rise to the present-day movement for the expansion of industrial democracy.

The considerable struggles against redundancy, victimisation of militants, against changes in work practices (whether it be the retention of the tea break, "the continuity" principle on the docks, or the struggle against the measured day) are evidence that it is these real objective circumstances rather than the agitational activities of this or that group that have given birth to this movement.

I do not wish to belittle the efforts of those who have devoted considerable effort to explain and further this movement. But unless we see its real roots, we will fail to understand its great potentialities for the movement as well as its limitations. It is necessary to see both sides if we are not to add to the confusion and the furthering of illusions.

Before and After Power

If we are to examine the potentialities of industrial democracy seriously, we must begin by making a clear distinction between what is possible before the working class take power and after.

Once the working class takes power, socialises the major means of production and sets up a working-class state, there ceases to be an irreconcilable conflict between management and workers, between the state and the workers. Does that mean then, that workers' control follows automatically and that all conflicts in all cases between workers and management disappear?

I do not think so. Industrial democracy, as any democracy, is a relative not absolute concept. What is true theoretically and has been demonstrated practically, is that, precisely because basic conflict between management and workers disappears, the extent of industrial democracy in a socialist state is considerably more extensive than is conceivable in a capitalist state (whether in private or nationalised industry). There should in theory be no resistance on the part of management or the State to the greatest possible involvement of workers in determining the environment in which they work as well as in decision-making to an extent well beyond what is normally understood by working conditions.

And in practice this is what is happening in one form or another in all socialist countries.

Management's right to hire and fire is in practice subject to the agreement of the trade union and, if exercised against its wishes, may be challenged in court where it is seldom upheld. Discipline is in a large measure exercised by the collective.

Redundancy as a consequence of changes in production, except as a result of agreement with the unions and provisions for retraining and alternative work is unthinkable.

While the State has the responsibility for appointing top management, it is as a rule done with the approval of the workers' elected representatives. Where the men through their organisation (the trade union) demand the dismisal of management, management will in general be replaced.

While management have the responsibility to ensure safety and provide welfare, training and educational facilities, their enforcement and supervision is done by the workers' elected representatives and committees.

Thus, because of the absence of a fundamental clash of interest between workers and management in a socialist state there is a tremendous expansion of industrial democracy.

Nevertheless it would be wrong to assume that all differences between management and workers disappear or that "workers' control" or "self management" exists or is theoretically possible, that is if by these phrases, is meant control over all aspects of production, e.g. including what to produce, pricing, investment, etc.

Under Socialism

Management even under socialism will tend to show greater concern for output and unit costs and, at times, this could very well encroach on the workers' rights and interests. That is why trade unions are essential in a socialist society and why basically their major function remains the same as in a capitalist society—the safeguarding of the workers' interests and upholding them against all comers—including management and state. Their task in fulfilling their objective is, of course, easier, precisely because the conflict is not basic, but marginal. Nevertheless there is no substitute for a vigilant trade union even under socialism. Plan

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fulfilment, etc., is in my opinion, secondary to this main function.

But even under socialism there are limits to the workers' rights in running the plant. Just as there remains sectional friction between management and the workers, there are also sectional differences between the workers of a plant and the community as a whole, between the workers of one industry and those of another who may be producing commodities which could serve as substitutes or alternatives.

Only in the sense that the workers as citizens have a political say in determining the economic and social policies of the state, in determining the main lines and indicators of the overall plan and in contributing towards the plant plan, can it be argued that workers' control becomes feasible under socialism. Pricing, allocation of investment funds, decisions on whether a particular plant or industry should expand or contract, I think must remain a function of the state during the first stage of Communism—Socialism.

Finally, I would suggest that it would be a futile exercise to speculate on the precise form and structure, in other words to work out a blueprint of the institutional mechanism that industrial democracy would evolve once the working class takes power.

Experimentation on how to combine expansion of industrial democracy with efficient management and maximum production (in which workers have a vital interest as all of it is returned to them, in one form or another) is taking place in all socialist countries. Workers' control in the full sense, historically existed in the Soviet Union only in the immediate post-revolutionary period before all means of production were taken into public ownership. Its function was to give the workers full powers, that is control to prevent the private capitalist from sabotaging his plant before it was taken over by the state.

I doubt whether the same forms and institutions will evolve in all industries, let alone all socialist countries. Much will depend on the nature of the industry, how dependent it is on other industries, on the level of the economy, on the historical traditions, etc. Nor do I believe that any particular form or institution will remain static. They will undergo constant change adapting themselves to the changes in productive forces, i.e. to the technological and other changes, etc.

Before Power

A serious examination of the possibilities for extending the workers' rights in industry must start with the recognition that there is an irreconcilable conflict between the employers and the workers—both as a class and as particular employer and workers who work for him.

This basic conflict extends to the management (the higher grades) and the work force, even where the top management are basically salaried and have no or practically no shares in the firms. This follows from the fact that the management's given task which must be fulfilled if their positions are to be retained, is so to conduct the firm's affairs as to satisfy the major shareholders' insatiable greed for maximum profit. And it is the incompatibility between the maximisation of profit and the workers' tireless struggle to achieve the greatest possible share of the product of their labour which lies at the root of the eternal conflict, the basis of the incessant class struggle at the place of work.

And because the capitalist state, in the final analysis, pursues policies advantageous to the employing class, the conflict of interests is extended as between the state and the working class. This basic conflict will therefore exist not only in the private sector of industry but also in the nationalised industries owned by the capitalist state and run to benefit the employing class.

The Government's incomes policy in general and the Prices and Incomes Act in particular and the experiences of the workers in the nationalised industries, whether under Tory or Labour Governments, ought to suffice to establish the correctness of these assumptions.

In such circumstances to talk about workers' control is to spread confusion and weaken the struggle. The fact that those who advance such slogans have the best intentions and the greatest concern for the workers does not detract from that fact.

If workers control a plant or firm, it is to be assumed that they will pursue policies advancing the interests of those they represent—the workers. But, by definition, those policies will run counter to the interests of the shareholders. Under such circumstances, the shareholders, since the sole reason for owning the means of production is to make maximum profit and they are deprived of the ability to do so through workers' control, will try to dispose of their holdings. But of course they will find this impossible as no one would buy them. There remains thus the possibility of the state stepping in as buyer. But it is a capitalist state and as we have argued earlier, the conflict of interest is not resolved within a nationalised industry in a capitalist state.

With the great technological developments, there also grew the interdependence of whole industries with the consequent limitations on the workers of one industry, let alone one plant taking decisions without seriously affecting the interest of workers in another industry.

The coal industry is an obvious example. Even if we assume that the miners were in a position

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to take all the decisions with regard to the production and marketing of coal, it would not necessarily stop the closures of pits. What the Government does with regard to importing oil and gas, what the price of North Sea gas will be, the attitude of workers in the oil, gas and nuclear energy field, are all vital factors in determining the market and therefore output, the price and therefore availability of funds for wage increases and improvements in working conditions.

Glib Talk

Where there is glib talk about workers' control, what is meant by it? The workers of pit, area, the whole mining industry, or the whole energy industry including oil, gas, electricity supply, etc? And how are the conflicting interests of these workers to be resolved? And in a capitalist society where security of employment is a crucial issue such conflicts are real ones.

The more one examines the slogan the less real it becomes. And, precisely because it lacks reality and is incapable of being realised, it will not help but rather hinder the feasible and necessary task of extending the workers' rights over new fields in all industrial establishments whether in the private or nationalised sectors.

It is hard to believe that those who use this slogan do not realise this. I do not believe that they are all utopian idealists out of touch with reality.

I believe a possible explanation for advancing this concept is the frustration felt by some at the total failure of the Labour Party to implement socialist policies preached, loss of faith as a consequence in a political road to socialism and a retreat to the old and long-forsaken syndicalist and guild socialist ideas of the militants of half a century ago.

However well intentioned, it is a defeatist and self-defeating approach. Difficult as it may be, there is no substitute for political action guided by a revolutionary political party aimed at securing political power for achieving the transformation of society, thus creating the condition for a vast expansion of industrial democracy and the establishment of genuine workers' control. For only when the working class have power can the workers, as citizens of a society where there ceases to be a basic conflict between them and the state and them and the property-owners (and higher management representing the owners), exercise control of their total environment including their work, and participate in evolving state, regional, local and work institutions.

Does this mean that nothing can be achieved in this area while capitalism exists? No, it does not. Much has been achieved, is being achieved and much more can and will be achieved by the workers' struggle to increase their say over a whole range of problems, influence decision-making, and increase their power to determine policy over a new range of issues affecting their working environment.

But to do this it is necessary to be aware of and avoid not only utopian illusions, but also the traps set by the employers, the Establishment and some right-wing trade union leaders.

Participation and Consultation

Participation is the catchword of the Right. This phrase covers a multitude of proposals and suggestions aimed at diverting the workers' struggle to extend his rights into safe channels. Basically it aims to create a façade to give the impression that workers' representatives at a number of levels have been party to decision-making. The objective is clear. It is to commit the workers to policies decided by management, and thus if not to eliminate at least to reduce and mute the struggle against them and achieve an easier acceptance. Joint consultative concepts and machinery have a similar aim.

I am not arguing against joint consultation or increasing workers' participation at every level. They can play a useful role in influencing policy, so long as they never lose sight of the fact that none of the forms of participation and consultation detract from management their right to make the decisions.

It is a dangerous pipe dream to believe that the appointment or election of workers' representatives, trade unionists, to various level of management, whether by agreement or legislation, would result in workers' control so long as the property rights remain vested in the shareholders.

Consultation is legally obligatory in the nationalised industries and exists fairly widely in private industry. In all cases, where the workers have realised its potentialities as well as its limitations, and have not seen it as a substitute for using their organised strength, such consultations have proved useful. In some instances policy decisions have been influenced, participation in joint discussions have extended the workers' knowledge and experience of the processes of production, problems of the market etc., and thus improved their bargaining position when participating in traditional negotiations.

What then is possible? The workers' traditional struggle for democracy in industry, the counterpart of the struggle for democracy in social and political affairs, a struggle against arbitrary Government based on private property ownership, has reached a new stage made urgent by the rapidly changing technique of production creating new problems which the workers dare not allow to be resolved

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unilaterally by the management—whether in private or nationalised sectors.

In the forefront are such problems as redundancy, manning, training, discipline, wages structure, round-the-clock working safety, work measurement.

The nature of the problem is how—as complementary to and *not a substitute for*, the political revolutionary struggle to transform society—to extend the worker's right to have a say in policy-making on the growing range of problems in industry vitally affecting his interests.

An examination of the successful methods used to extend the workers' rights will give us an indication of the major means of fulfilling this vital need.

Advance through Struggle

It is a fact that in a considerable number of plants, firms and industries the management's hitherto undisputed right to hire and fire, pursue investment policies leading to large-scale rationalisation involving basic changes with regard to labour force, working conditions and earning potentialities, have been severely restricted.

While in some of the nationalised and semi-nationalised industries (Dock Labour Board) there are legislative restrictions with regard to discipline and obligation to consult the trade unions on a number of issues, the real advances in this field which have taken place have been as a result of bitter and sometimes prolonged struggle by the workers involving strikes, work to rule, bans on overtime, etc. (often without the approval of the official machinery of the trade unions) which compelled management to yield in what had hitherto been the sole preserve of management.

The Donovan report on trade unions in its table of causes of all unofficial strikes (95 per cent of all strikes) on p. 101 shows that of 2,196 strikes in 1964-66, over half, that is 1,144, were on issues other than wages (redundancy 326, discipline and working arrangement 646).

Whatever extensions of workers' rights other than in the traditionally recognised ones of wages and hours, have taken place, have been as a result of struggle using the traditional methods.

It is illusory to believe that there are alternative means of consolidating the gains made and extending them. Whatever other measures are advocated (and there are some very useful ones) they must be seen as supplementary and subsidiary or measures designed to facilitate the traditional method and form of working-class struggle to encroach on managerial functions.

The Redundancy Act and the proposals of the Donovan Commission that victimised workers be compensated are important indications of the extent o which *struggle* has already succeeded in making these two important managerial functions susceptible to erosion.

At the same time it is important to see in both these proposals not a consolidation of these encroachments of managerial functions as a result of struggle, but on the contrary a subterfuge to buy off the workers' struggle to consolidate and expand their rights.

If this is the major road for advance towards greater democracy in industry, it follows that the major emphasis must be on ways and means to enhance the concept of struggle and to strengthen the means of struggle.

It is, therefore, appropriate at this stage to examine such measures.

Lines of Struggle

The right to strike is the be all and end all of industrial trade union struggle. Only by the threat to deprive them of the wherewithal to make profit—the withdrawal of labour—can the workers exert any pressure on the employers and compel them to yield some of what was hitherto their sole preserve. Thus the fight to preserve the right to strike—the repeal of the Prices and Incomes Act and for the rejection of the Donovan Report—are at the very heart of the struggle to extend industrial democracy (that this is recognised by many active in this field may be seen from the Resolution along these lines adopted by the Nottingham Conference on Workers' Control). The right to trade union recognition falls into the same category. Struggle, to be effective, implies organisation to use the workers' collective strength. Legislation to compel trade union recognition will help and is worth supporting, but struggle to win recognition will remain the most important means of achieving it. The successful Roberts Arundel strike shows the way.

Workplace organisation is the essential weapon enabling the workers' to wage successful struggle. This means that anything done to strengthen the shop stewards' (or their equivalent) status and authority, should be supported and policies designed to weaken them (proposals in Donovan Report, measured day work, other wages structure that weakens the shop stewards' negotiating opportunities) should be resisted.

The slogan of "open the books" is a very important one. For maximum information is of considerable assistance to the workers' representatives in negotiating with the employers to win public support by the dissemination of the real facts and circumstances of the struggle as a counter to the distortions in the press aimed to alienate public support. The extent of knowledge required should be related to the needs of struggle. Some advocates of workers' control carry over a utopian attitude

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to the "open the books" slogan. This may be seen from the sort of detailed information listed as necessary in the pamphlet by M. Barrett Brown and published by the Institute for Workers' Control which goes far beyond such needs.[1] The detailed information on production, marketing, substitute products, social cost involved, possible alternatives, investment policies, research, etc. would only make sense if the workers really did have full control of production and marketing. This concept which is neither realistic nor attainable is enough to frighten off most workers.

Solidarity is another key concept. Any gain made by any section of workers as a result of struggle is a springboard for other sections. The struggle for encroachment on managerial function is usually much more resisted and bitter than one for a wage increase. This is because success changes the balance of strength in favour of the workers for future struggles and is therefore costlier than a wage increase, part of which can often be passed on in increased prices. That is why solidarity is so important.

It goes without saying that a big recruiting campaign to increase trade union membership, improvement in the democracy and structure of trade unions to sharpen its fighting edge is very relevant.

Workers' Representation in Nationalised Industry

The problem of workers' representation at all levels of management, the extension of consultation to all aspects of production and distribution are important if democracy in industry is to reach out to the attainable boundaries even within the framework of capitalism. But, in my view, such representation, the method and form varying from industry to industry and from private to nationalised industry, is ancillary to trade union struggle to consolidate the inroads made and to encroach still further on managerial functions. The attainment of such representation and the extent to which it operates, will itself be dependent upon the degree of struggle generated to achieve such representation and to ensure that it results in a useful service for the workers.

The nationalised industries in a capitalist state are expected by the state to pursue policies which will benefit the private sectors. Nevertheless, it is much easier to win widespread support for demands that the structure, management and policies of such nationalised industries should reflect much more the interest of the workers they employ and the community as a whole (e.g. to take into consideration the social cost involved in various alternative policies) than it is in the case of a *privately*-owned monopoly.

To the popular mind at least there would seem to be no conflict of interest between management and employees. It is what has made the concept of workers and trade union representatives on the nationalised boards acceptable.

Their presence—a minority of right-wing trade union leaders on boards predominantly staffed by representatives of big business—seems to have had little effect on the boards' policies and attitudes. The frequency of strikes and other forms of action in mining (until the industry started contracting), rails, passenger transport and docks (the nominal employer was till recently the publicly set-up Dock Labour Board) shows that the need for traditional struggle was no less in publicly than privately-owned industry.

It is sometimes argued that the reason is the method of appointment. The trade union members of the boards do not come from the trade union involved nor are they answerable to the unions.

The method of representation to be advocated is not so simple as is sometimes thought.

There is a fear among trade unionists that if board representatives are to be elected by the unions, there would be a danger of committing the unions to Board policies and consequently a dual leadership could emerge. There would then be two sets of leaders who could be in conflict with each other to the detriment of the workers. In the formative years of nationalisation there appeared to be an opting for reliance on unfettered trade unions to look after the interests of the employees, and a reliance on the presentation of a general workers' point of view on the boards by trade unionists on them, albeit from other industries, and not selected by or answerable to the particular trade union involved.

In practice this total separation and absence of accountability has not worked. The trade union representatives seem to have been completely assimilated by the big business environment in which they found themselves.

Nevertheless, while it is right to recognise that it did not work and that alternative means based on accountability to the workers are likely to achieve better results, only those arrogantly ignorant of the reality and complexity of the problem, would fail to realise the dangers involved in direct representation answerable to the employers. The danger is committing the employees to board policies. The fact that wrong decisions could lead to non-re-election, is no remedy for sometimes irreversible policies which commit the workers to policies against their interests.

[1] *Opening the Books* by Michael Barrett Brown. Institute of Workers' Control.

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The old method having totally failed, I believe, the risk of direct and accountable representation of the employees at all levels with at least 50 per cent of the nationalised boards being elected by the workers, is a risk that is worth taking. But only on the clear understanding that the vigilance and readiness to struggle through the traditional trade union machinery should not be neglected, but should in fact be strengthened, and that under no circumstances should the workers feel themselves committed by board decisions accepted by their elected members—any more than they feel themselves bound by decisions of a Labour Government that are contrary to their interests.

In private industry workers' directors would, in my view, be a red herring. In conditions where there is such an obvious clash of interest between the sole purpose of management—maximisation of profit—and the workers' interest, there can be no basis for coexistence in a decision-making body. The most that can be expected is joint consultation backed up by pressure from below to ensure that the consultation is real, timely and provides all the necessary information relevant to the decision. But it would be illusory to believe that workers will share in the making of decisions through representation on boards.

In private industry, only strong trade union organisation and militant action will compel the employers to yield to the workers the right to participate in decision-making on a whole number of issues which are still within the sole authority of management today and which the workers feel should come under their jurisdiction.

The extent of successful encroachment on managerial functions will reflect the balance of strength between the employers and workers.

Legislation to compel recognition and to provide information to strengthen the ability of the organised workers to conduct the struggle is a legitimate pursuit in the effort to extent the boundaries of industrial democracy. So is legislation to alter the Nationalisation Acts to enable the necessary changes in the composition and structure of management at all levels, thus permitting the workers to play a bigger part in shaping those industries and the environment in which they work. It is also necessary to advance the demand for legislation providing for the election of safety officers similar to the inspectors elected in the mining industry.

It would be remiss to end this article without sounding the alarm—that the present rights of the workers are in very great danger.

The Prices and Incomes Act, the Donovan Report, the proliferation of tri-partite committees aimed at involving the trade unions in Establishment policies, are all directed to emasculate the trade unions, to transform them from organisations founded and developed to conduct the class struggle reared on the profound theoretical concept (albeit presented by some of its leaders as founded on pragmatism) of the irreconcilability of conflicting interests between workers and employers, into passive Establishment institutions, pledged to find ways and means of getting the workers to accept the employers' policies because they masquerade as those of the state, with the sole function of the trade union to become a junior partner marginally influencing such policies.

The first step in order to hang on to the democratic gains and win new ones, is to preserve the only weapon for so doing, an independent trade union movement pledged to use its collective strength and, where necessary, the ultimate weapon—the strike—in struggle against the employers.

Repeal of the Prices and Incomes Act, rejection of the Donovan Report, an end of TUC vetting, and withdrawal of the TUC from NEDDY are slogans very relevant to the struggle for industrial democracy to-day.

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absence of a classical cyclical crisis of relative over-production is due in any way to a general policy adopted by monopoly capital or state monopoly capitalism. In my view the political and economic factors which have greatly expanded the role of state monopoly capitalism (in many ways a new phase in the development of capitalism) may well have been partly concerned with the political dangers inherent, in the second half of the twentieth century, in any return to the previous boom-and-bust-pattern of affairs. It is at least possible, however, that the absence of a classical crisis is the outcome of a specific phase in the development of American imperialism—just as a century ago the special development of British imperialism had its world role to play.

As difficulties multiply for American imperialism owing to the uneven development of world capitalism and the opposition of former colonial and semi-colonial peoples, the inflationary process may come to an end. Whether it is followed by a classical crisis or by more and more peoples turning to a socialist solution of their problems will depend on the relative strengths of class forces and their deployment at the time.

The point is that I believe that inflation can only be explained by the absence of a cyclical crisis of relative over-production. At the same time I think it would be foolish to believe that a new cyclical crisis cannot possibly recur—with consequences which might be very different from what has been considered normal in the past.

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Educating Marxists

Study of the Early Days of the Plebs League in the North West

Edmund & Ruth Frow

(Edmund Frow is Manchester District Secretary of the Amalgamated Engineering and Foundry Workers' Union; Ruth Frow is Deputy Head of a Secondary School and has recently obtained her Master's Degree in Education with a thesis on Independent Working Class Education in South East Lancashire).

"The 150th anniversary of the birth of Karl Marx this week (May 9th, 1968) may well turn out to be a more genuinely universal commemoration than that of any other great figure of the past. . . . He forms part of the living universe both of intellectuals and, through the medium of the movements and governments inspired by his ideas and those impelled by the belief in their iniquity, of vast sectors of the world's population who have barely heard the name of any other philosopher or social scientist. . . . His intellectual stature is recognised, with enthusiasm or reluctance—rarely with indifference—wherever there are people capable of reading books." (*Times Literary Supplement, Leader*, page 481, May 9th, 1968)

IN these terms an Editorial Comment was made recently on the inadequate publication of Marx's works in English. While making full allowance for the crocodile character of the tears shed by *The Times*, that this comment needs to be made is the result of the failure of British Marxists and scholars to press for the full works to be made available. We must surely blame no one but ourselves. The political prejudice in publishing, the high cost of publication and the publisher's demand for large circulation have all helped to muffle what should have been a roar.

The disastrous May election results showed that there was little understanding on the part of the labour movement of the need for basic social change and an end to the system of capitalism under which we live. The Tory-like policies of the Wilson Government were clearly rejected, allowing the true-blue-Tory policies of the Conservative Party to emerge victorious. If the movement had been armed with the basic knowledge of the principles of Marxist thought, a very different result would have been seen and the Labour abstentions would have been used to force progressive policies on the elected Councillors.

Earlier socialists in the period before the first world war and during the 1920's were more far sighted than we appear to be. They took their Marxist education very seriously and spent much "blood, sweat and tears" in mastering the intricacies of economics and historical development. Thousands of working class students enrolled in the classes that were run by the *Plebs League* and later the National Council of Labour Colleges. In these classes they taught themselves the basic facts of life in a capitalist society and by so doing they armed themselves to play a part in the daily struggles of the workers to better their conditions and change the social order. We may question their approach at times—but we cannot fail to appreciate their intentions.

Plebs League Founded

During the ferment at Ruskin College, Oxford in 1908, when the Universities authorities were trying to influence the content of the curriculum and also to obtain control of the College, a League of Plebs was formed by past and present students of the College "to make clear the real position of Ruskin College, to point out its weaknesses, to outline its possibilities, to demonstrate its value to the Labour Movement if definitely founded thereon, to stimulate active interest in working class education and to open out propaganda of an educational character from a working class point of view."[1] Ex-Ruskin students began forming education classes up and down the country and in the April of 1909, the dismissal of the socialist principal of the College, Dennis Hird, acted as a spur to the movement.

The train of events leading to the Ruskin strike of students which followed Dennis Hird's dismissal, clearly showed the increasing influence of Marxist ideas in the developing labour movement. In his history of the Central Labour College, W. W. Craik said that the students who had arrived at Ruskin in 1908 although, "socialists of one shade or another—ILPers, SDFers, Clarionites and one

[1] *Plebs Magazine*, Vol. I. 1909, pages 1-2.

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SDPer." were soon made "aware that the socialism of the second year men was hewn from a more solid and durable stone than ours." They had been studying the works of Marx and Engels in self-study classes in which it was the practice for each member of the class to be given one of the more difficult passages from *Capital* to explain to the rest. "Through these classes and the individual study which they involved" Craik accounted for the knowledge and understanding of the "inter-related forces at work beneath the surface of social life."[2] and therefore for their confidence and competence in meeting the confusions and conflicts which developed in the College.

The strike acted as a catalyst and Plebs League classes sprang up in many places. In the North West, Harold Kershaw, a woodworker from Rochdale and Jack Owen an engineer from Hulme, Manchester, were among the students who returned from Oxford[3] and immediately began campaigning to set up classes of worker students who would master the basic principles of Marxist economics. Noah Ablett, the Welsh miner who later was mainly responsible for writing *The Miners Next Step* said, at the first National Meet of the Plebs, that the time had arrived when "the working class should enter the educational world to work out its own problems for itself."

Rochdale and District Classes

Harold Kershaw began work in earnest after the first Plebs Meet. At the second Meet in 1911, he was able to report[4] that there were one hundred and fifty students attending the classes which were held seven times a week between October and April. Two of the winter's students were awarded scholarships to enable them to study full time at the Labour College. This split from Ruskin, after the strike, was first housed in Oxford but soon moved to London. Classes at Rochdale, Bury, Waterfoot and Oldham had already formed themselves into a loose amalgamation calling itself the Rochdale and District Classes.

The Oldham class met on a Thursday evening. There were twenty seven students and they met weekly with the exception of Christmas and New Year Weeks. Frank Jackson, a member of the Associated Society of Engineers, who later moved to London, was the class tutor and they followed the "Economics" outline drawn up by Meredith F. Titterington of the Leeds, Halifax and Bradford Stuff Dressers Association.

This outline was published in Rochdale in 1910 or 1911 by the Bury, Oldham, Radcliffe, Rochdale and Waterfoot Branch of the Central Labour College. It covers twenty one lectures for a five shilling fee. The notes for the first lecture will indicate the standard expected:—

Lecture 1. Political Economy: Its Scope, Categories and Schools.

A. Scope: production, including distribution and exchange.

B. Categories: value, exchange, money, capital, wage, labour, surplus value, profit and rent.

C. Schools a. Ancient—Aristotle (Greece) 384-322 B.C.
b. Mercantile—Stafford and Locke (England close of 16th century and beginning of 17th century.)
c. Classical—Petty, Smith, Ricardo (England) 1699, 1776, 1821.
d. Physiocrat — Boisquillebert, Sismondi (France) contemporary with Classical School.
e. Marxian.—Marx, 1860 onwards.
f. Utility—J. S. Mill, Jevons, Böhm-Bawerk, Marshall, 1860 and onwards.

Books of Reference

Critique of Political Economy, Karl Marx, Preface and Ch. 1, 2, 3, 4, of the Appendix.
Plebs Magazine, April, May, June, July, 1909
Easy Outlines of Economic Science (Ablett).
Political Arithmetic, Sir William Petty: *Selection of Political Economy*, Robertson
Economics of Socialism, Hyndman, Ch. 7.
Wealth of Nations, Analysis, Books 1, 2 and 4, Adam Smith.
Guide to the Study of Political Economy, Cossa, Historical Part, Ch. 1 to 7.
Marxian Economics, Untermann, Ch. 13.
Landmarks of Scientific Socialism, Engels, Ch. 8, Section 1.

The preamble to the outlines claimed that:

> "The Rochdale and District Classes form part of a provincial scheme of education, which it is intended to develop throughout the organised Labour Movement, and run in conjunction with the Central Labour College. Together with the College these classes have for their object the training of men and women for the industrial, political and social work of the organised Labour Movement."

Working class organisations were urged to affiliate and "take control of the education of their members."

The class book of the Oldham members (which survives) shows that of the twenty seven students, six were women. More than half the students achieved full attendance and the tenpenny fare of Frank Jackson from Rochdale to Oldham (return) was subscribed each week. There was a twopenny charge for each lecture which began at eight and lasted one and a half hours.

[2] *The Central Labour College*, Lawrence & Wishart, W. W. Craik. Pages 52-53.
[3] "*The Burning Question of Education*", Plebs League.
[4] *Plebs Magazine*, Vol. 3. 1911. p. 178.

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The group which organised the Oldham class was associated with the Social Democratic Party. Some of them later called themselves Anarchist-Communists and were in touch with Sylvia Pankhurst whose paper, *The Workers' Dreadnought*, they used to leave in railway carriages together with copies of *The Spur* and *Plebs*. When the Communist Party was formed in Oldham at a meeting in the Temperance Hall (Chartist) in 1920, several members of the class were present.[5] George Mearns, a moulder, Alice Smith and Albert Brooks, a railwayman, joined the newly formed Party. George Mawdsley a joiner, Alf Tattersall who worked with him at Platt Brothers, Mr. Goodwin, Mr. McLean and Jim Tudor did not immediately join. Alice Smith had a successful career. She was sent from the Oldham class to the Central Labour College in 1913 and on her return conducted a highly successful class in "Philosophic Logic." She wrote articles for the *Plebs Magazine* from time to time and, after her marriage to J. Pratt, wrote an impassioned plea which must have touched a cord in many a student breast.[6] She admitted to having nearly wept over Joseph Dietzgen's *The Positive Outcome of Philosophy* and made a telling case for a simple textbook on the subject, something the average man "can lap up with his Quaker Oats—something he can read (and understand) as he runs." She prepared an outline for such a textbook which was agreed upon at a text book conference of the Plebs League in 1920. This does not appear to have been published.

Syndicalism

The period which saw the rapid development of classes such as that at Oldham has been characterised as "the Great Unrest." Events during the period 1911-1914 show the organising power and influence of the Syndicalists. Syndicalism originated in France and spread to the United States of America. It also spread to Britain where its doctrine of the complete supremacy of the trade unions took the form of a series of strikes which were supposed to culminate in a General Strike in 1914. The workers were led to take action because of a considerable fall in real wages. They accepted left-wing leadership because of the failure of their elected representatives to give any convincing opposition to the policies which gave rise to such a situation.

The form which Syndicalism developed in the United States differed from the British form. There, the Syndicalists, under the leadership of Daniel de Leon, advocated a policy of one union to an industry as well as industrial action to secure political demands. Industrial Unionists in this country advocated break-away unions rather than working inside the established structure. Syndicalists and Industrial Unionists joined the Plebs League in the call for "independent working class education." This stemmed from the understanding that all education was given in the interests of a class in society. If it was given in the interest of the ruling class, it could not be in the interest of the working class. Therefore there was a need for separate education to enable workers to play a part in the class struggle; and the content of such education should lead to an understanding of the need for economic and social change. Obviously the tutor of such classes had to be a worker because only a worker saw the worker's point of view and the classes had to be self-supporting or supported by the Labour Movement.

Among the active workers in the Independent Working Class Education Movement were several prominent Syndicalists and Industrial Unionists. In the North-West, the most successful in his work for working class education was John Hamilton of Liverpool. During the First World War, he became Organiser of a breakaway union, The Building Workers Industrial Union. This was formed in 1914 largely as a result of the bricklayers' and masons' frustration following the unsuccessful strike of the building workers. The Union was short-lived. After the outbreak of the war, many of its members were imprisoned as Conscientious Objectors, conscripted into the army, or in hiding.

It ended in 1916 and this gave the IWCE movement one of the best tutors and organisers it ever had. John Hamilton became a class tutor, the secretary of the Liverpool Council for Independent Working Class Education, the secretary of the Liverpool Labour College and later still, the National Chairman of the National Council of Labour Colleges. He also helped in the formation of the Communist Party in Liverpool along with Bessie and Jack Braddock, and, like them, he joined the Labour Party and became a Liverpool Councillor and Alderman.

Plebs League in World War I

During the 1914-1918 war, the classes had a struggle to keep in being. There was considerable confusion in working class ranks. Blatchford of the Clarion and Hyndman of the SDF as well as Christabel and Mrs. Pankhurst immediately became supporters of the war and encouraged their followers to participate in the war effort. The pacifists in the Co-operative movement and the Independent Labour Party refused to fight and the Syndicalists who were "anti-patriotic" helped to develop the shop-stewards movement. To add to the confusion, the Trade Union leaders entered into an industrial peace agreement with the Government so that workers

[5] Letter from W. Mawdesley.
[6] *Plebs Magazine*, Vol. 12, 1920, page 60.

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were unable to use "normal" channels to obtain redress of their grievances. The workers were subject to long hours and the employers seized every opportunity to whittle away the gains won during the pre-war struggles. Huge profits were made, prices shot up but wages did not rise commensurably.

The dawning realisation that their patriotism was being exploited led to the emergence of a new militant movement. The leadership of the movement rose from the ranks, because, as the Webbs put it, the trade union apparatus was now recognised as a "part of the social machinery of the state." Many *Plebs* students became leaders in this movement. Among them were Frank Jackson who had tutored the Oldham class and Tom Mann, Jack Owen and Noah Ablett. On the Clyde, the Scottish Labour College was in the thick of the struggles. John McLean, the organiser of the College was one of the most active leaders and was one of the finest teachers of Marxism the movement has known. Clydeside became a huge tutorial class with sustained discussions in the factories and in the shipyards. There were huge open air meetings and demonstrations where the sale of Marxist literature assumed mass proportions. When the Government took repressive measures against the Workers' Committee on Clydeside and deported eight of the leading Shop Stewards, the unrest spread to Sheffield, London and Liverpool with the deported Shop Stewards showing the way.

During the war, the Plebs League maintained its structure but had to accommodate itself to the war-time conditions. Rochdale, ever a pioneer in working class activity, organised four lectures on consecutive days on the subject of "An Introduction to Social Science." These were given by W. W. Craik. The rest of the course was handed over to local student lecturers. Frank Jackson explains in a report in *Plebs* that because students were having to work overtime, classes were being held on Sunday mornings instead of Tuesday evenings. Rochdale also offered spare tutors to surrounding classes—a notable achievement at such a time. In 1917, although Harold Kershaw was called to active service, Rochdale was offering lectures on "Industrial History," "The Materialist Conception of History," "The Evolution of Species" and "Working Class Philosophy." These classes were tutored by local students who gave their services. The Manchester Labour College which developed rapidly after the war helped to educate a formidable group of stalwarts, many of whom are still giving yeoman service. Among the names associated with the College were Alf Purcell, Gabriel Cohen, Ben Ainley, Bill Gee, Bonar Thompson, Sam Knight, Jack Munro, Willy Paul and Mick Jenkins. Moses Baritz who once embarrassed Hyndman in a notable encounter, (see Tommy Jackson, *Solo Trumpet*, page 84) was also active in the College.

Partisan *Plebs*

A tribute to the effectiveness of the education in such classes was given in the Report of the Industrial Unrest Commissioners for Wales and Monmouthshire in 1917. They advised that the State should provide adult education of a "broad," "impartial" and "humanistic" character as a "corrective to all methods of study of a purely partisan character undertaken for propagandist objects." The Commissioners commented that "of late the workers have both widened and narrowed their outlook. Improvement of status, rises in wages, have all proved ineffective against the more obvious pressure of capitalist economy and the patent gambling in the necessities of life. This has been taken advantage of by teachers and leaders, and out of it has developed a form of class consciousness increasingly powerful and deliberate of purpose."

The workers, as a class, had, they maintained, been exploited and were being taught that as a class they must seek and win freedom. Having pointed out, with commendable insight that the workers asked for and received intensive and partial education lacking the "essential spirituality of education," they suggested that the Government should provide facilities for the spread of education and of knowledge—"not knowledge in the narrow limited sense of equipment, but knowledge sought in the spirit of truth and pursued for its own ends." "Plebians" rightly regarded the report as a testimonial to the effectiveness of their methods, and determined to re-double their efforts.

The positive features of Syndicalism were the advocacy of organisation by industry and a realisation of the need for social change. The negative aspects were the rejection of political class struggle and the failure to appreciate the role of the State. A series of articles in *The Socialist* in 1912 argued the case for and against, and this discussion continued into the postwar period when it was resolved within the ranks of the newly formed Communist Party. The trends of socialist thought were reflected in the content of the *Plebs League* classes. The violence of the industrial struggles of the "Great Unrest" indicated a need for a trained and disciplined trade union membership. The content of the early classes obviously sought to supply this need. The class struggle was a glaring fact. Few workers could escape participation in it and few would wish to do so because the struggle was to lead to social change and the realisation of Socialism in the near future. Strikes were not only to remedy the bread and butter issues but were part of a class move

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forward. The subjects studied were those that would lead to a deeper understanding of this struggle and enable the student to play a more active part himself and pass his knowledge on to others with a snowball effect. The depth of study expected of the *Plebs* students is indicated in the "Students Outlines" published in the magazine *Plebs* in 1916.

This education was for the truly dedicated. It reflected the trends which went to form the *Plebs League*—the Marxist Socialists of the Social Democratic Federation, the break-away leftists who adopted the American version of Industrial Unionism and the Syndicalists. Taken together they formed a select group of specialised thinkers. But they shared a belief in the efficacy of education and that was the star which guided the growth of the Independent Working Class Education Movement.

The end of the war ushered in a short period of apparent prosperity. Prices rose sharply, but wages also rose. The growing realisation of the importance of the Russian Revolution sent the returning workers into the trade unions, the political parties and the Co-operative Movement. It also sent them into the rapidly expanding *Plebs* and Labour College classes. The workers in this period were on the offensive. In the General Election of 1918, the Labour Party entered the electoral field as a national party. Although they only gained sixty seats, the defeat of the Independent Liberals gave them the status of an official opposition. In the thirty by-elections which took place between the General Election of 1918 and the summer of 1920 there was a decline of 4,500 votes for the Government and an increase of 135,000 for Labour. When in July of 1920, there was a threat of war against the struggling Soviet Union, the working class sprang into action to prevent it.

Postwar *Plebs* Education

The three years which saw the end of the war and the return of the young men from the prisons and the armed forces to the workshops were teeming with hope and activity. The urgency with which the enlightened young people eagerly grasped the opportunities of learning the fundamentals of the class struggle showed that they were determined to change the old moribund social order. Within the Independent Working Class Education Movement, the "young men in a hurry" wanted to move faster than the entrenched stalwarts of the prewar days were able to go. They found the detailed depth of the Labour College syllabus too cumbersome to acquire the necessary knowledge quickly. They therefore sought to change the content of the classes to bring it into acceptable "modern" terms. They also demanded text books with interpretations of the classical philosophic and economic works. They had no time to spend years mastering the "in" language. As Alice Pratt confessed during the Textbook discussion she had often wept from self-pity in her struggle to master Joseph Dietzgen. Her sympathy went out to all those who were "taking a first nibble at its pages." She commented that "one dose of Dietzgen makes the whole world kin." Apart from the content of the basic courses, subjects were introduced to help the workers to participate in postwar life. J. F. Horrabin explained at a Conference in Manchester in 1920 that "since this is an age of imperialism, of world development and exploitation, and therefore, of ever-increasing interdependence and interrelation of nations," it was obviously "impossible intelligently to understand present-day politics" without some knowledge of Geography. He queried whether it was possible to study either Economics or Industrial History without a background of geographical facts.

During the early 1920's the *Plebs* text books appeared and were discussed in the magazine. The new content called for a different approach to tutorial methods. The long twenty lecture courses was continued but short "crash" courses of six sessions or a weekend were developed. Teaching methods also changed and John Hamilton was a pioneer in the use of visual aids such as lantern slides to help in sugaring the pill of his lectures.

National Council of Labour Colleges

This development was accelerated when, after the lead given by the Amalgamated Union of Building Trades Workers in 1920, many trade unions adopted education schemes in association with the National Council of Labour Colleges. This amalgamation of the classes which sprang up after the war co-ordinated and developed the work which had to some extent been haphazard before. The impetus gained from the formation of the NCLC and the publication of text books carried the movement to what appears to be its peak in 1926. While the NCLC lived on until after the second world war, the numbers of students attending classes steadily declined and the content of the classes conducted was more in line with the "knowledge sought in the spirit of truth and pursued for its own ends" which had been advocated by the Industrial Unrest Commissioners. It also brought the NCLC in line with other organisations such as the Workers Education Association and removed their basic reason for a separate existence.

There were, of course, other reasons for the changes in the NCLC. The fact that trades unions affiliated and provided the financial backing of the organisation in time blunted the independence of the education. He who pays the piper tends to call the tune. After 1926, the militancy of the trade

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union movement was temporarily lost in the confusions of Mondism and industrial peace. The boasted *Plebs* motto "I can promise to be candid, but not impartial" lost its force when the subject being studied had little social significance.

Another factor which militated against the continued development of independent working class education was the attitude of the newly formed Communist Party. The Party criticised the Plebs League treatment of economic and philosophical questions as abstract. They also claimed that there was no such animal as the "non-Party" Marxist. At the time there must have appeared to be a great need for inner Party discussion to resolve the difficulties inherent in setting up a coherent unified organisation from the different strands from which it was formed. Instead of injecting the necessary revolutionary content into the NCLC classes, direct Marxist-Leninist education under the direction of the Party was developed. This expression of the Party's inexperience helped to weaken and eventually kill the independent working class education movement.

The question which now arises is, can we afford the luxury of a leisurely approach to correcting mistakes which arose in understandable and indeed forgivable circumstances forty years ago? The Municipal Election results and other phenomena such as Powellism would indicate that we cannot. Our working class is amongst the finest in the world. Its history of struggle and conflict is second to none. But an unarmed opponent is easy game to the man with the gun, and the working class without the basic understanding of the laws of social development is unarmed in the face of imperialism and incipient fascism.

The Weapon of Marxism

We can smile at the seriousness with which the stalwarts of the "Great Unrest" period tackled "particular and general commodities," "exchange value," "use value," "preserved value" and "surplus value." But contrast their understanding of the need for struggle to change society with that inculcated in the TUC's classes on "Aspects of Industrial Psychology," "Productivity Agreements" and "Industrial Relations." Granted, the Communist Party still provides basic Marxist education for the development of Party members and likely recruits. But these are, unfortunately a select few and their provision is not plentiful. *Marx Memorial Library* makes strenuous efforts to reach out to wider sections of the London population. There may be other valiant assays on the bastions of ignorance which prop up the decaying walls of capitalism, but their influence is local and ineffectual.

The sixty-four thousand dollar question which now arises is how can we take remedial action to place the weapon of Marxism into the hands of the working class who will certainly know how to use it.

We have to look carefully at the content of our text books and see that they are written in language which is suitable for present use. In a television era we cannot expect the majority of people to plough through close written pages of reasoned argumentation and spend precious time discussing abstruse formulations. While avoiding falling into the trap of studying only aspects of theory which are directly relevant to the everyday economic issues we must try to base the studies on meaningful situations. We already have visual aids that can help to interest people in the content of a lecture in the prints and slides that can be hired from the Communist Party, King Street, This needs developing locally so that ideas can be put across in terms of the students' past.

In addition to text books and visual aids, we can use our rich heritage of song and poetry. The young people have shown what interest there is in different forms of folk art. Why should we leave these to commercial interests to develop? Through the use of films and drama we can get ideas across which would take months of hard study in a *Plebs* type class. There is no shortage of ideas about how to put Marxism across once we sit down and think about it.

Which brings us to the second major question, how can we reach people who show a marked reluctance to leave the TV. If the Editorial in the *Times Literary Supplement* is an indication of the interest which is shown in Marxism, there must be many who would be interested in meeting to discuss how to go about it. This should not be under the aegis of the Communist Party which is a political party and not, except in the broadest sense, an educational agency. The object of the discussion or conference should be only to discuss how to enable the maximum number of people to get an introduction to the rudiments of Marxism—not to undertake any political action nor indeed to draw any political conclusions. Each students' own experience will help him to do that and discussion with others will plant the seeds. Marxism sells itself once the basic idea is grasped. Those of us who have been fortunate enough to live in a Marxist atmosphere, with the basic tools of scientific socialist thought at our disposal, know how the everyday events fall into the pattern of our thought and we have the means, even if we do not always use them, of taking action to help forward the progress of society. If we can find the way to reach out to the working class in terms of education, they will know how to interpret these ideas into political action.

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The political situation in this country today is pregnant with possibilities. Whether those possibilities are used to advance the working class along the road to socialism or are left to the ruling class to deprive the workers of hard earned crumbs from the national cake, depends largely on whether we can reach out with the message of Marxism to the people. Obviously we are not in a short time going to reach the masses, but we must find ways of educating Marxists among the ranks of the organised labour movement. It has been done before—it can be done again.

Discussion Contributions on:

The National Problem in Britain

Desmond Greaves

I SHOULD like to comment on some of the points made by previous contributors to this discussion and to add some further points. Barbara Ruhemann did a notable service by restoring the original text of Stalin's definition of a nation. Had this been available earlier James Reid would not have said "By whatever definition one cares to use *Scotland* is a nation." He would have said *the Scots*. And Idris Cox, after replying that Scotland and Wales (geographical entities) are not nations might not have confused nations and States. There is even a practical point here. The present territory of Scotland and Wales may not be coterminous with the respective nations. There is a case (whether good or bad I cannot say) for the agitation in Maelor (Flint) for transfer to Cheshire. And there may be other adjustments I have heard Welsh nationalists speak of, where the transfer might be to Wales.

Idris Cox, in his valuable, thought-provoking article, considers that if the Scots and the Welsh were nations, the Communist demand should be for "complete independence," by which I take it he meant secession. But this is not the classical demand. The classical demand is self-determination, which includes the *right* of secession, but not the obligation to secede.

Perhaps it is because his mind recoils from the labyrinthine complexities involved in secession, that he first denies the Scots and Welsh the right of nationality by definition, and then proceeds to draw a blue-print for a federal Britain.

Right of Self-Determination

In my opinion the Welsh and the Scots are nations for the purpose of the right of self-determination, and they must be accorded that right, including the right of secession. I am of course not venturing to advise them to secede. I merely assert that they have the right to do so if they wish.

First as regards the definition by Stalin. It is known that in 1925 Stalin criticised his theses of 1913, explaining (to Comrade Semich of Yugoslavia) that the identification of the struggle for national self-determination with the bourgeois-democratic revolution was now out of date. "It has become a constituent part of the general proletarian socialist revolution." He did not of course criticise the definition, but it is worthy of note that it was drawn up mainly to refute "national cultural autonomy" the basic feature of which was that while members of the nations composing the Austro-Hungarian monarchy were to be recognised for cultural purposes, the Austro-Hungarian *State* was not to be touched. Stalin's purpose was not to institute public examinations at which nations could establish their credentials, but to guarantee their right of self-determination no matter what time-honoured empire had to lose ground.

When, thanks to the crisis of World War One, the self-determination of nations on a world scale (in conjunction with the proletarian revolution) had been placed on the agenda of history Lenin approached the matter differently. Who were to be permitted self-determination? Practical common sense answered "those who wanted it," in Lenin's words any "alien people" by which he meant "a people that has preserved its peculiarities and its will for independent existence." And he defined self-determination as the right "freely to determine whether they wish to live as a separate state or in union with whomsoever they choose."

The Scots and the Welsh might very well choose to live in union with the English in a federal state,

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as suggested by Idris Cox. I am aware that the Scottish nationalists demand what they call "Dominion Status," for some reason preserving an affection for the Crown. But as Idris Cox rightly observes, it is not absolutely clear yet what they mean by this.

If in fact they may well end up accepting federation, what am I jibbing about? Precisely this: if the Communists of Wales and Scotland appear to offer the Welsh and the Scots a ha'porth less than self-determination, then they are at the mercy of the nationalist parties of these two countries. Far better to stick to the demand for Scottish and Welsh Parliaments. Let these Parliaments express the self-determination of the peoples. If the result is a demand for secession, then draw up a treaty for questions of common concern, and take it in good part as Sweden did in 1905. If, as in my opinion is more probable, but of course not certain, the decision is some form of association with England closer than would be provided by a treaty, then once again the terms require discussion with the representatives of the Welsh and Scottish people. The question of an English national assembly should present no difficulty in either case. What objection can there be to it?

I would now like to turn to the question of the cement that binds the present United Kingdom together. Idris Cox speaks of Scotland and Wales as "integral parts of the British imperial system." But apparently they differ from other integral parts of the imperial system, such as Mayfair or Gibraltar, in that though "part and parcel of the exploiting and oppressive machinery of imperialism" they are "at the same time being exploited from the standpoint of their national rights." How does this affect the status of their peoples as nations? It merely attempts to define their relations with other nations. One is tempted to suggest that Idris Cox uses the word British before he has justified it, and thus creates a tautology.

A Multinational State

The national question must above all be treated historically. The introduction of the Norman feudal system into England was followed by efforts to extend it to Wales, the starting point for Ireland, and Scotland. It is hardly in dispute that the Irish responded to the invasion with a national resistance movement. And I recall reading that when Henry II returned from Ireland, Welsh people came from miles around in the hope of seeing the fulfilment of the prophecy that an English king would slip on *llech llafar* and break his neck.

It is not usually argued that Wallace did not lead a national liberation movement, or for that matter Glyndwr or, to stretch a point even Lliwelyn. The aggressive character of Norman feudalism (to which the English were still an alien people) strengthened the will to remain independent, and created much of the character of these peoples. Feudal Union preceded legislative Union by a considerable period. But even in the case of Wales, the judiciary union was not completed until the 18th century.

A few words will illustrate the problems involved using Scotland as the example. The Union took place in the year 1707. It was preceded by a long bitter struggle. The English Parliament fought the Scottish merchants by manipulating the Navigations Acts. It met their attempts at separate development with an Aliens Act. Scotland was already a colonial power of a sort. Her last attempt to break the English stranglehold was the Darien adventure, the ruin of which was assisted by English policy. It was the crippling losses incurred by almost every merchant in central Scotland that undermined the capacity, if not the will, of the Scots to resist incorporation in the United Kingdom. On the English side the Union involved allowing Scottish merchants such access as they could get to England's ill-gotten gains. In return England secured Scottish consent to the Hanoverian succession and support against France. But the Act of Union did not pass without wholesale bribery. Aristocrats like Atholl and Tweedale received £1,000 apiece. Lesser fry got proportionate considerations.

The Price Paid

What had happened? The aristocracy and the most substantial merchants had betrayed the nation to England. These and their successors shared the colonial loot as it accumulated. But they were a minority. Unless one identifies a nation with its aristocrats and bourgeoisie, then there was not even accommodation, let alone amalgamation or fusion. And the smaller sort of capitalists, who adapted themselves to English hegemony by instituting a regime of exploitation and reaction seldom paralleled in these islands, remained as Scottish as their descendants are today. Periodically they have shown their heads—the most notable period being that of the French revolution.

One should not therefore speak of the creation of a British super-nation. Certain classes in Scotland accepted a multi-national state dominated by the English. They were reconciled to this unpleasant situation by the opportunities it afforded for robbing third parties, inside and outside Scotland. The workers and colonial peoples provided the sugar for the pill. But the Scottish people paid in the distortion of Scotland's economic life, the preservation of feudal elements, and such appalling consequences as the devastation of the Highlands.

These areas were reduced to a state of destruction which is surely unique in Europe. A few years ago I met Ordnance Survey men who told me that they had been forbidden to record the names of the

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ruins that strew the landscape, even when these were well known. The people were cleared to the sea-board, the lowlands, Canada and the crack regiments of imperialism. The defoliants used were four-legged ones "integrated" (as is the fashionable word) with the Bradford rag trade. I met the grandson of a Highlander in Birmingham whose face was suffused with passion when he spoke of the clearances and the Gaelic language and culture he had been deprived of. The remaining crofters will point out those of their animals which are descended from the stock of the farms their forefathers were driven from. It is amazing that English tourists can drive through the Highlands without a flicker of shame. But they do. But why labour this? Because such traumatic experiences in the life of a people can only be resolved by democratic action of the people themselves. This is one of the strongest arguments for self-determination, freedom to solve national problems.

The Present Crisis

So much for the Union and its effects. What is happening today is that the old relationship between London-based and Scottish capital is breaking down. The reasons are not far to seek. One is the development of state-monopoly finance capital. Here of course is a real fusion. The old comfortable role of the smaller capitalists disappears. A section of them sally forth to do battle for rights they seemed to have forgotten all about. They demand the right to limit the scope of monopoly capitalism in Scotland. As well as small issues such as the "tapering" of transport costs, are important ones. They suspect that international cartel agreements, accepted by Westminster for reasons of imperial policy, are stifling Scottish production. They demand the right to appoint consuls throughout the world to promote Scottish trade. There is a conflict between sections of the Scottish bourgeoisie and London-based finance capital. This is an excellent thing. We should support the Scottish bourgeoisie.

But their movement arises from the extreme crisis of imperialism and neo-colonialism. This crisis naturally affects other classes. The Scottish National Party programme does not envisage the overthrow of the dominion of finance capital. It is therefore reformist. But the right-wing Labour programme lacks even that modest qualification. Workers disillusioned with right-wing labour therefore turn to Scottish nationalism, as a part of the swing to the left which naturally follows the transfer of imperialist burdens to the people of the island of finance-capital, formerly more favoured than they are now.

Of course, to support this new bourgeois party to the detriment of the working class, or to regard its objectives as adequate for the working class, would be a different matter altogether. To the working class the crisis of imperialism and neo-colonialism provides the opportunity to solve problems of the widest scope, including the agrarian question in the Highlands, and the reform of semi-feudal laws, on the basis of making Scottish wealth, Scottish justice, Scottish culture the property of the people of Scotland as a whole. But the class structure of Scotland, the inevitable class composition even of a bourgeois national party, and the realities of the crisis of imperialism, make inevitable a class struggle within that party, and the possibility of an alliance where the objectives of the working class will permeate the entire movement.

Marxist Policy

It seems to me therefore that a Marxist policy has two prongs. First, the recognition of the right of the Scottish people to make themselves, in their own way, whatever changes are required in the economic, political, legal and cultural life of their country. Second the presentation in this context of lines of solution possible to a united working class at the present time, without waiting for constitutional changes. In this dual approach there is the basis for unity with all that is best in nationalism.

I hope I am clearly understood not to be attempting to make policy for the Scots, but to be speaking by way of illustration of principles. It is conceivable that sections in nationalist parties may at some time attempt an accommodation with monopoly capitalism. Should that happen it may be that the Scottish working class, like the Irish, will prove the "only incorruptible inheritor" of the struggle for national freedom. I suggest that this positive approach to the Scottish national question gains favour by contrast with the black and sneering opposition to the "Scots nats" expressed in the organs of Fabian opportunism. If in order to get democracy and socialism in this island the United Kingdom must be geographically broken up, why flinch from it? But it may not be so. The solution is self-determination which provides for either possibility on a democratic basis.

I have illustrated with Scotland. I believe the same principles apply to Wales, but their mode of application is necessarily distinct. Finally I would be strongly opposed to dividing the existing Communist Party as long as the multinational state survives. A single centralised organ to face the paramount State is necessary for the process of solving the national problem, quite apart from the fight against the fused monopoly-capitalism of this island. And as Idris Cox points out, the attitude of the English workers is of vital importance. The struggle for self-determination for the Scottish and Welsh nations is a part of the general struggle against imperialism. But we must always remember that it is only a part.

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Alan Spence

WE ought to have it quite clearly in the forefront of our mind that the struggle of the Communists in Scotland, Ireland and Wales is different from the struggle of the Communists in England.

Scotland, Wales and Ireland are in a quickly developing stage of the struggle for national independence (though, because of the law of uneven development, Ireland needs a separate analysis, even if much of what has to be said is pertinent). This struggle has thrown up mass movements corresponding with the needs of these oppressed nations and the aspirations of the people requiring freedom from a yoke which holds them back from advancing to a solution of their basic national and social problems.

The fact that the struggle for national liberation of these countries has been clouded by the utilisation with which the English imperialists put them to in its conquest of its empire outside the British Isles—or even within it—should, in not the smallest degree, divert us from the recognition that, in this respect, they were no different in kind—even if their enjoyment of the spoils was higher—than the role assigned by the English imperialists to other conquered territories: whether it was raising Sikh troops for the suppression of Singapore, or the facilitated transfer of Indian workers to improve prospects for exploitation in Kenya.

Of course, there were features which differentiated the relationship of these colonies to the metropolitan centre.

The main and essential feature was the highly developed indigenous growth of capitalist industry and the close links which the capitalist class of these countries developed with the English ruling class.

Process of Assimilation

Over the many decades this assimilation of the ruling classes has withered connection with their national roots. And with the growth of Empire the national bourgeoisie of Scotland, Ireland and Wales more and more identified their interests with the continuation of an imperialism which developed under the collective description of "British," even though the English were always the dominant part of the collective.

With the development of monopoly capitalism, this process of assimilation has intensified until no difference can be discerned either in culture, mode of existence, ideology or, significantly, mode of speech between the ruling class who profess to Welsh and Scottish nationality and the English ruling class.

However, be it noted that it is the English ruling class which has absorbed the other nationalities, and not vice-versa.

Of course, this process of absorption is anything but new in world history. Imperialism, whether of the old Roman type or modern capitalist, is always characterised by the assimilation of the oppressed national ruling class to that of the oppressor.

That this is so should be of no surprise, for it serves the interests of both ruling classes. For, the former ruling class can continue to receive some of its former privileges—and may even improve upon them—whilst the oppressor can rule the subject nation the easier by buying off the ruling class usually after it has given it a sound thrashing just to show who is the master.

Though the ways of a conqueror are many and diverse, it can happen that, with the adoption of a higher economic formation, certain sections of the labouring classes may benefit accordingly.

However, this development within the dominated nation is only permitted to the extent that it serves the interests of the ruling class of the ruling nation. Nations which are ruled must, in one form or another, pay tribute, or strengthen the general position, of the metropolitan centre.

Hence it is that Ireland from almost time immemorial, Scotland and Wales have increased the wealth of the English ruling classes in the past and, continue to increase the wealth of the ruling class in power today.

At a rough and conservative estimate, £500 million a year flows from the three colonies into England, with Ireland, achieving partial political independence and falling a victim to neo-colonialist economic exploitation, the most cruelly dealt with of all.

No doubt some of the ruling class, may reside in one or the other of these countries. But the strategic and financial power is centred in London; from whence the pipers (pibroched to the Gaelic and Celtic sentiments) play the tunes traditionally reserved for those who possess the wealth.

For centuries the wealthy of England waxed fatter because of the exploitation of their European colonies. The City of London, that unquenchable sponge, which has sucked the wealth of empires into the building of its magnificent and fashionable areas for the rich, lives a parasitic existence.

Surfeited with the culture, artistic and financial wealth syphoned from the four nations, it spreads its contemporary wealth in the massive uplift of spectacular blocks; offices created to the power and glory of monopoly domination in the seat of its sovereignty, where rents per square foot would

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each provide two houses in the poverty stricken slums of the colonial cities.

If employment, education, wages, social facilities etc. are better for the working population of the "south", it is not only because of the higher technology; but because of the centralisation of Imperial management, the concentration of financial institutions; the flow of immigrants, educated, fed and kept until their migration by the Welsh, Scottish and Irish people; the cheap agricultural produce of Ireland and the constant flow of profits into the capital.

And this will continue to be the case until the national destinies of these dominated peoples is transformed to one of self-determination, whence, shaping their national wealth to the benefits of its indigenous inhabitants, they can speedily remove the disadvantages bestowed upon them as tributaries.

This does not gainsay the social improvements which have already taken place. If the wages of some sections of the organised workers are as high as the best in England, it has arisen because of the prolonged and persistent struggle to bring about improvements. It happened not because of the benevolence of capitalism, but because the working class returned some of the squeezing and sprung a few more drops to their own advantage.

Necessity of National Sovereignty

But this is only dealing with pennies when we ought to be thinking of £'s. For there can be no ultimate solution to the bitter social problems without an end to exploitation as national minorities; the winning of national independence, the creation of their own *state* and the establishment of a socialist system of society.

Therefore, without the slightest shadow of a doubt, the principal problem of the Scottish, Irish and Welsh people, is the winning of their own, unfettered by neo-colonialism, national sovereignty. That in the course of this they will also be winning the day for socialism, should not obscure from view that the wrong strategy in the struggle for independence will, most surely, delay the day of entry into the Socialist future.

Laid upon the shoulders of the communists, then, is the unavoidable responsibility for the policy they express to meet the practical requirements of this new stage. And that it is a new stage is so demonstratively true; for, when since the days of the first Irish Rebellion, have we witnessed such a mass surge for Home Rule?

National Communist Parties

Upon consideration it seems clear that the present organisational structure of the Communist Party of Great Britain is no longer adequate.

The present arrangement whereby Scotland and Wales—though Ireland already is independently organised—are districts of the CPGB was satisfactory for the early period of growth in which the Marxists were small and could best develop as an organised body within the generalised, supranational form of the British Labour Movement. But this form can now no longer facilitate growth. And this arises from the different tasks confronting the different national movements.

Scotland and Wales have growing national mass movements for independence. England has not. So, unless the Scottish and Welsh comrades correctly ascertain the problems they must solve, they will become isolated from the masses.

It being the case that these countries have these special, national problems, problems emerging from their historical development, which only become clearer as they press forward towards a nationhood free from external domination, it would be the grossest neglect of the principle of national sovereignty for the present organisational structure to continue.

For, how can the communists of Scotland and Wales call for national independence when they themselves are not nationally independent? How can they proclaim to the people that the indigenous people are the sovereigns of their own national affairs, if they, themselves, are but quantitative extensions of a body whose structure is international?

National and Political Emancipation

No! To be honest, to be unambiguous, to be quite clearly self-sufficient, the communists of Scotland and Wales must become national parties. For only thus will they be able to present themselves to their own people as the most capable, politically clear and determined "sons of their native soil."

For the Scottish and Welsh comrades have mass movements to work with which do not exist in this form in England. If follows from this that they will have to make judgments which, though English comrades being Marxists and approaching problems with the same method, would, without question, arrive at the same answers, are not part of the internal struggle in England.

From this new situation which confronts the communists of Britain, flows the necessity for us correctly to define the essence of this process so that we can develop the strategy to carry us theoretically through the next stage of struggle.

For nationalism, in the European colonies of England—Ireland, Scotland and Wales—represents the necessary organisational form for the political emancipation of these subject nations.

It is the necessary form because it exhibits the

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capacity to embrace the many sided relationship which constitutes the opposition arising from the tightening exploitation of a declining imperialism struggling to retain its traditional power.

Because it represents the nation emerging to statehood all its constituent parts are in motion seeking to free themselves from wherever the leeches of imperialist bondage have lodged. Be the leeches home bred or imported, their draining of the national wealth to the City of London—and more recently into the coffers of US and other Imperialism—becomes more tenuous as more social aspects become aware, with deeper profundity emerging as the evidence of parasitism becomes clearer.

As National Independence will—at the least—slow the flow of tribute to the metropolitan centre, imperialism will spare no effort to retain its position. But, because Imperialism now consists of capitalism dominated by monopoly and finance which has progressively eliminated, or alienated—or is rapidly doing so—all the varying strata of the different stages of capitalism, the support will rest upon the very narrowest of bases.

Therefore, the overwhelming majority of the people in moving towards national emancipation will come into collision with monopoly capitalism.

With the wealth of the nation's industry concentrated in London, ownership, upon liberation, can directly pass into the hands of the people; but, and this is the decisive point upon which hinges the future development of the State—what will be the social composition and political perspective of the people into whose hands falls the capacity to determine change?

For, as all but the direct beneficiaries of imperial rule and monopoly capitalism will be in motion seeking to redress the wrongs to which they have been subjected, each will seek state power to serve their special interests. And, looming large amongst the contenders for the reins with which they can guide the state machine, will be the working class.

The working class component of the national movement for independence is the basic foundation, the numerically largest, the most ideologically committed, without whose aid a party, be it revolutionary or bourgeois, will struggle in vain.

Therefore, whoever wins the ideological leadership of the working class wins command of the force, and the only force, capable of taking into its possession the power of the state and forestalling over a prolonged period any attempts to restore the former, direct imperial rule.

But, as the masses will be moving onwards within the broad wave of the national movement, those who wish to influence its direction must necessarily be also within, guiding, exhorting, setting the temper of energetic practice as integral particles; the sum total of which constitutes the wave. Those who try to surf-ride; attempting to lead the movement from on top, will find instability at every contrary current and tumble, with the complete loss of control, at unexpected squalls.

Communists and National Parties

Therefore, the necessary internal basis for transforming the possibility of National Independence into the reality of one orientated towards Socialism rests upon the condition of the participation of members of the Communist Party joining as individuals the ranks of the National Parties. In doing so, they will be able to steer the course in the determined direction which will lead to a landing whereupon the nationalist flag can be unfurled upon a socialist beachhead. And the impetus of the movement—unsidetracked by outworn doctrines—can directly face on to the creation of a socialist society.

In pursuance of this policy the organised, vanguard role of the national Communist Party is the essential condition for success. Without the guiding role of scientific socialism, the national movement will ebb and flow with every "storm-warning" until its strength is spent, to end by drifting on to the first stable foreshore its exhaustion will permit. But, with the Party as its mentor, it will force the passage of each obstacle and, irrespective of temporary setbacks, will rise to greater heights to pound afresh with the inexhaustible strength welling from creative struggle; and, with the undiminishable persistence granted by the perspective of the future, pursue that future to its conclusion.

For the Communist Parties guided by Marxism-Leninism, will, in acting from the agreed policy, work in every sphere of the broad movement with each member working to carry with him the support of the working class and patriots in the overall struggle for independence.

Winning this support because the policy of the Communists corresponds to the needs of the movement; winning the support of the unemployed because the unemployed cannot be employed without a resurgence of economic life; winning the trade unions and trades councils because communists have best defended their standard of living in the past, exhibiting the capacity to improve on it in the present and expounding the only hope of bettering it in the future.

Winning the Labour Party whose leadership have reneged on the struggle for Home Rule and, who, in capitulating to monopoly capitalism have shown their ideological bankruptcy and the certainty of further traumatic shocks leading to wholesale defeat if allowed to continue with their present policy.

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Winning the tenants, pensioners, housewives, who each, in their special way, bear a large brunt of imperialist exploitation.

Winning the students, whose present difficulties go from bad to worse; facing a future barren of all the ideal possibilities so quickly absorbed in the rich intellectual atmosphere of academic life.

Winning the small—and not so small, these days—business man whose life is squeezed; not to give a better service to the people, but to provide higher profits for the monopolies.

Winning the patriot whose overwhelming desire is to see a birth-right restored and an end to the impoverishment of his native land, the intellectuals, artists, scientists, technologists; all who bear the aflictions of latter day imperialism, with both its spiritual poverty and economic turpitude.

Working from the conviction that all these, cannot only be won, but be underpinned by the fixed certainty, that they *must* be won. For winning the people is as essential to winning a liberated nation for socialism as a passenger liner is to its engines. The most powerful and smooth functioning engine in the world is completely useless without a ship to push.

There are vexing, tactical problems—of the relationship of Parties; whom to support in certain elections, how to help a Constituency Labour Party threatened by Transport House; these and problems as yet unseen will be endemic. But through the process of democratic discussion, adherence to majority decisions, maintenance of overall perspective, we can be assured that our endurance and fortitude will provide its just reward: the winning of national independence with the organised expression of the working class well to the fore when hands are reaching out to take possession of the state.

Federation of Parties

This does not imply that the Leninist role of the Communist Parties becomes any the less necessary. On the contrary. The Communist parties must seek to form a national front of all the organised sections; the Scottish or Welsh Nationalist parties, the Labour Party, Co-operative party and others, into the broadest unity of all forces desiring progressive and patriotic change.

From all this it follows that in the complex situations which will confront the comrades in the national struggle the present structure of the Communist Party would be an anachronism, clogging up the process of decision taking and standing in the way of immediate activity. Therefore, it must go and a new form of organisation, capable of developing the next stage of struggle, be introduced.

Because the four nations of Britain do form an historically formed economic unity; albeit though it be an imperialist monopolistic one with all the distortion and uneveness characteristic of an anarchic, profit seeking system, there is clearly a great deal to be won by applying reason and planning to overcome the deficiencies which are our common lot.

Also, the working classes of the nations have worked together as a united body (though Ireland, is now somewhat different) since the days of the industrial revolution, producing in the course of this development the strongest and most cohesive single trade union grouping within capitalist Europe and, clearly, any breach which impairs this unity is unthinkable.

But, because we recognise a unity of purpose, a singleness of mission, it does not, because of this, compel all to be within the same body. Very much on the contrary. For it is clearly and easily understood that the variety of organisations arise to cope with the many-sided aspects of our industrial, social and political life.

Therefore, if we project the conception of a Federation of Communist Parties, each to represent one of the Nationalities, it will be grasped that this new organisational form conforms to the new tasks which have to be dealt with and that, far from weakening the movement, it will strengthen the Party's capacity to meet the present and immediately, future problems.

All movements and processes go through a life span of birth, development and decay. At a certain stage of development the content it has absorbed in its growth to that stage expresses its richness by being compelled to branch off, to divide, and take on its own separate existence. This capacity to divide must not be looked upon with regret but with the satisfaction arising from the awareness that from small quantitative beginnings it drew in so much succour from its surroundings, that a stage arrived when it could no longer handle its extensiveness, therefore parts divide off to look after their own content. But, because the contents develop from the same grounds of existence, the relationship of one to the others is as inseparable as the branches of the same tree. It follows that what they have in common consists of a sameness, though different parts of that sameness. And, therefore, it is in the interests of each to see that that sameness is preserved from that which is not sameness. Furthermore, as they will have a common regard for ensuring the proliferation of their sameness, a unity of conception to facilitate proliferation emerges as a logical necessity. Hence it is that changing the singleness of the CPGB into separate Parties of Nationalities and reconstituting these parties into a federation in no way infringes the universal process of development but is the living, concrete proof of its validity.

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Federation of Nations

In doing this we shall indicate the perspective for the future democratic structure of Britain in which, the Federation of Nations will, though they exercise their own sovereignty, show the unity of their sameness and, through the particular forms that the specific conditions of Britain ordained, express the universal relationship by which "Working men of all countries, unite!"

Giving embodiment through our own historically created institutions to the principle which is the cornerstone of human freedom "A nation which oppresses another nation cannot of itself be free."

The peoples of Ireland, Scotland and Wales are already advanced on this road to freedom. Let the Communist Party of Great Britain be not outpaced by this movement. Let it so change its structure that it has the capacity to hasten the fullest expansion; so that jointly with the English it can usher in "The Federated Socialist Republics of (England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales) Britain."

Discussion Contribution on:

Gold and Inflation

William Mennell

THE question of the price of gold and the nature of the engine which drives the process of inflation are topics which have already stimulated a great deal of writing and speaking—and with good reason. One is entitled to suspect that it will be some time yet before these subjects are exhausted. *Money & Inflation* by Emile Burns (Lawrence & Wishart) has now been published for some months but, so far as I am aware, has not attracted the serious appraisal it deserves. I feel it is high time to open a discussion on certain of the themes appearing in his latest book—especially as I think it contains serious errors of fact and theory.

One thing is certain—the publication of the book was timely since before many people had time to read it thoroughly the American dollar developed such weakness that the previous automatic link between the dollar and gold has been broken and there are now two markets (or two sets of markets) in gold in the world.

It is tempting to engage in a disputation on the question of the function of gold and how its value and price is determined but this is likely to be a diversion from the main objective of Emile Burns—that is to explain the process of inflation. I propose, therefore, to draw attention to some aspects of the Burns thesis on inflation and I believe that the questions relating to gold will then fall into their proper place.

Symptoms or Diagnosis

The real basis of my criticism of "Money and Inflation" is that, although Emile Burns claims to explain inflation, the end product is no more than a catalogue of symptoms of inflation (with most of which we are quite familar) but does not lead up to any *diagnosis*. Certainly many others have tried to make an analysis of inflation with very little success and therefore readers will understand and appreciate Emile Burns when he says that:

> "Each of these factors is linked with one or more of the others, so that it is not possible to say how much of the general rise in price is due to one factor alone. But some examples will illustrate how one factor or another works, and help to explain the persistence of the rise in prices since the war."

On the contrary, I do not believe that description of "factors" is a substitute for analysis. In fact the more factors that are described, the less the persistence of the rise in prices is explained.

Clearly Emile Burns is primarily concerned in his book with the gradual rise in prices in Britain over the postwar years:

> "It is constantly in the public eye, with one government after another professedly trying to end the 'creeping inflation' by measures which do not seem to have much effect in stopping the rise in prices but which bear heavily on the people, on wages and on industry. So we have to ask: what are the factors which result in this continuous rise in prices?" (p. 12)

In several places Emile Burns contends that the price movement referred to has no parallel in previous periods of capitalism and he seems to support the views of Amedeo Grano in an article entitled "Inflation as an economic Policy."

> "This article presents the postwar inflation as a policy carried out by the monopolists with the assistance of their governments. The author points out that the cyclical movement of the economy, which in Marx's day led to crisis and unemploy-

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> ment, gave the employers the opportunity to cut down in the crisis the wage increase won in the period of boom and full employment. But the cyclical movement was no longer operating to the same extent as previously. Since the war the accumulation of profits has been practically continuous, and this has provided the resources—new capital—for the technological progress that has been seen in the capitalist world generally." (p. 61).

It is also recorded that in Amedeo Grano's view the new element which has made the continuous accumulation of capital possible has been "the monopoly power of control over the market, backed up by the policy of the monopoly capitalist state."

Somewhat later Emile Burns states his own view quite clearly:

> "Inflation, therefore, is due neither to the workers' struggle for higher wages nor to some natural economic law with which it is beyond the power of man to interfere. Inflation is a man-made phenomenon, and it is made by the class in whose interest it works."

Closely associated with this theory are the views expressed by Emile Burns with reference to the specific function of gold. He declares quite categorically that the abandonment of the gold standard for currencies has "created the conditions in which price rises were possible. Then other factors came into operation which were the direct *causes* of price rises."

In its most simple terms therefore Emile Burns' thesis seems to be that, because of the new relation of class forces after the war, monopoly capital can no longer cut wages in the old way and has had to be satisfied with an indirect attack on wages—"to attempt to reduce real wages through the raising of prices." At this point the question to ask is: How is it that a process of holding down real wages during a long period of rising prices has not resulted yet in a classical crisis of over-production? The answer of Grano and Burns seems to be that such a crisis has been prevented by the application of the continuous capital accumulation in technological advance—one of the objectives of which is surely to increase the productivity of labour. The effect should be in the long run to reduce the demand for labour and the creation of unemployment.

Another explanation of what has actually happened could be that, although inflation (or continuously rising prices) is a specific policy adopted by monopoly capital it has been signally unsuccessful because workers have been continuously in such a strong bargaining position that they have been able to raise their prices (i.e. wages) so as to maintain or even improve their relative standard of living.

Obviously if one lets the matter rest there a further set of inconsistencies begin to appear.

The Quantity Theory

Emile Burns discussed this in Chapter 2 of his book under the title "How Money is Made." His general proposition is that the quantity of money is increasing over the years, since the process of the production of things automatically increases the total stock of money:

> "In modern society the quantity of money in a country and in the world as a whole is *directly* raised by the amount of precious metals produced each year and converted into coin. It is also *indirectly* increased by the production of all other things, on which a profit is made by the capitalist class out of the labour of their employees."

This is a very strange statement indeed. As practically no "precious metals" are converted into coin nowadays, presumably there is no direct increase in the quantity of money from this source. Up to this point in his book, Emile Burns has been concerned with only one precious metal, viz: gold, so that one is entitled to enquire what other metals should now be considered.

Then Emile Burns goes on to explain that, according to the Marxist theory of value and surplus value, the money for which commodities are sold in each turnover of production (less the production costs) represents "an addition to the previously existing stock of money." This seems to be the same as saying that the amount of surplus value gives rise to an equivalent increase in the total quantity of money. As a corollary to this Burns explains that if, in any economic crisis, products are sold below their value or even below their cost, there will be a temporary decline in the supply of money.

Can it be that the Marxist formula describing the operations of a capitalist enterprise (M—C—M^1) is being held to infer an increase in the money stock equivalent to the difference between M and M^1? If so, how can it be explained that the amount of money representing M^1 minus M is created to enable values represented by M^1 to be realised in the market?

It is, of course, quite ridiculous to assert that the sale of commodities in each turnover of production creates an addition to the previously existing stock of money equal to the amount of surplus value. Marx asked himself the very same question in Vol. II of *Capital*.

> "Where does the additional money come from, by which the additional surplus-value now contained in the form of commodities is to be realised?"

His reply was:

> "The additional money required for the circulation of this greater quantity of commodities of greater value must be secured, either by greater economy in the circulating quantity of money—whether by means of balancing payments, etc., or

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by some measure which accelerates the circulation of the same coins—or, by the transformation of money from the form of a hoard into that of a circulating medium."

"Too Much Money"

Having shown earlier that there is a built-in tendency for the quantity of money to increase from the very circumstances of capitalist extended reproduction, no doubt Emile Burns found it necessary to dispose of the old cry of "Too much money chasing too few goods." His first attack seems to consist of showing that there are two kinds of buyers—capitalist buyers of capital goods and consumers interested only in consumer goods. He makes the point that there is plenty of money chasing capital goods and therefore their prices may well rise more than other prices—and eventually be passed on in final prices.

This is all very well provided that the increased volume of goods at the higher final prices can in fact be sold without the process of reproduction being interrupted—so this also brings us back to where we started.

Hence Emile Burns then lists a number of specific examples of price rises (caused by higher indirect taxes, monopoly power and the like) and shows that there has been a parallel demand for higher wages which then become costs and higher prices again. As I see it, wages are only a specific form of prices, and I do not understand how it is possible to assert (as Emile Burns and others have done) that rising wages are largely the *effect* and not the cause of "policies which imposed constantly increasing prices on the earners of wages and salaries." It is impossible in my view to say that one is primary and the other secondary.

The phenomenon which we have to examine is a fairly long period in which all (or nearly all) prices have risen (and this includes wages as a special form of price) without the emergence of a classical cyclical crisis of relative over-production and the creating of a large army of unemployed workers. Furthermore it is necessary to recognise that the condition described applies in varying degrees more or less on a world scale—since even in socialist countries there has also been a process of rising prices during the last twenty or more years.

Postwar Exceptionalism

Emile Burns consistently compares the postwar inflationary process with the "golden age" before 1914—when all countries of any importance were on the gold standard thereby fixing the relationship of one currency with all others. This is the starting point of his book and therefore one can only assume that it is primary to his whole argument. Many of his propositions on this subject are, in my opinion, open to question. He says:

> "The result was that, so long as countries remained on the gold standard—which meant that notes or any form of money could be exchanged into gold units—both rates of exchange with other countries and internal prices in Britain were relatively stable . . ."

and

> "In the days when Britain was 'on gold' and a £ was a gold sovereign, the general level of prices was more or less stable."

One is tempted to enquire why Emile Burns makes a special claim about the stability of *British* prices whilst the leading countries were on the gold standard—and to wonder what happened to prices in other countries. Since they were on the gold standard as well presumably they enjoyed the same benefits?

The real answer to these questions is that the account by Emile Burns contains several errors of fact. In the first place, the adoption of the gold standard during the nineteenth century was nowhere near the perfect picture which he represents. For instance, even the United States did not adopt a pure gold standard until 1893 and even at the end of the nineteenth century very few countries had a fully effective gold standard in actual operation in the same sense as it was understood with reference to sterling.

Similarly it is simply not true that exchange rates and internal prices (even in Britain) were "relatively" or "more or less" stable. Britain adopted the gold standard in 1844. One index of British price movements recently published shows that they fell from about 110 to about 87 by 1851; then rose to 125 by 1856. In the 25 years from 1871 to 1897 the index of prices fell from about 125 to 68 and then rose during the next 17 years (up to 1914) to 100.

Industry and Empire by E. J. Hobsbawn (Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1968) describes in intriguing detail the place which Britain occupied in the world during most of the nineteenth century. Despite the Great Depression of 1873 Britain developed international trade to an abnormal extent and became an imperialist country in every sense of the term. Even when British hegemony in the world came under challenge:

> "The threads of the world's web of trading and financial settlements ran through London, and increasingly they had to run through London, because London alone could fill the holes in it."

The truth of the matter seems, therefore, to be that is was the pound sterling which was dominant in the world: Britain fixed a sterling price for gold and the rest of the world had to lump it—until 1914.

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Professor E. Victor Morgan in *A History of Money* (Penguin Edition, p. 165) argues that the pre-1914 gold standard system was related more closely than any international system before or since, to the supremacy of a single centre—London. He agrees that it kept the production costs of internationally traded goods roughly in line between different countries and it maintained a constancy of exchange rates but:

> "On the other hand, it did not, even in its heyday, prevent fluctuations either in the general level of world prices, or in employment. Unemployment among trade unionists showed strong cyclical fluctuations . . . Prices also rose and fell with the cycle and, in addition, there were strongly marked trends extending over periods of twenty to thirty years. Wholesale prices in Britain rose by about 35 per cent between 1850 and 1873; fell by 40 per cent from the mid-seventies to the mid-nineties; and had then risen by some 25 per cent by 1914."

My argument, therefore, is that it is entirely misleading to ascribe to gold and the gold standard the transcendental merits which Emile Burns describes. His adoration of gold leads him to say that when the gold standard was abandoned "exchange rates became artificial, Government determined, with the object of keeping them stable" and as for internal prices in Britain "the pound was no longer a sovereign made of gold but a paper note." In view of the fact that most transactions in Britain (in terms of total value) are settled neither in gold nor paper notes but by cheques, this last statement by Emile Burns does not seem to say anything at all.

Dealing with the position after the Second World War, Emile Burns correctly observes that exchange rates were fixed by international agreement in relation to the United States dollar. In my view this correctly recognises the real facts, namely that whereas formerly sterling determined the price of gold, what matters now is the price fixed in terms of the dollar.

Recent developments have shown that, when the rest of the world has a diminished interest in acquiring dollars because of the emergence of inflationary tendencies in the United States and other factors, the dollar price of gold as a fixed constant is in danger. Hence the emergence of two gold markets—one between Governments and central banks still based on the parity of $35 per fine ounce and the other free and outside the United States. So long as the *dollar* was scarce and "hard" the US authorities had no difficulty in maintaining the price of gold at $35.

International Liquidity

This is a burning issue at the present time. Emile Burns says the problem is "how can a country pay for imports, or pay for goods and services which it needs in other countries—for example, overseas military expenses—if it has too little gold or internationally accepted currency." This is such a simplified exposition of the problem that it is positively misleading. Naturally, with such a simplified version Emile Burns is entitled to remark that a return to the gold standard would not offer much hope to a country "whose trouble is that it has not enough internationally acceptable money or gold to pay for what it considers it needs."

Whilst I agree, of course, that the overseas military expenses are indefensible on more than mere economic grounds, one has to recognise that certain overseas military expenditure (such as that of the USA) would, if terminated suddenly, quite likely create a new crisis of international liquidity in certain areas of the world at least. The point I am making here is that the subject is much more complicated and intractable than might be judged be reading Emile Burns' book.

Towards the end of his book Emile Burns, as already mentioned, stigmatises inflation as a policy specifically adopted by the ruling class in whose interests he says it works. He notes however that it "conflicts with the expansion of the economy, and in Britain particularly with the attempts to maintain the exchange value of the £." When, as he says, the conflicts produce a new situation of crisis, we have the all-to-familiar restraint policies the main aim of which is to hold down wages relative to prices—thereby tending to create a larger number of unemployed.

Because Emile Burns (and others) find something unique in the pervasive inflation of the past twenty years or so he naturally finds it necessary to produce special reasons. On the contrary, in my opinion there have been previous periods in the history of the capitalist world in which prices of all kinds have risen steadily for long periods of years and in which the standard of living of the workers has generally improved.

I think it makes more sense to see the process of rising prices (and wages) punctuated from time to time by rather feeble attempts to attack wages as a response to objective circumstances—both economic and political. From the point of view of the working class I am not convinced that the last twenty years have been bad years in terms of the general standard of living. I have the impression that monopoly capital is fighting a rear-guard action all the time. So long as the working class can insist on full employment (or near full employment) and wage increases of its satisfactory bargaining position, it will constantly create difficulties for monopoly capitalism.

Still the really important question is whether the

(Concluded on page 303)

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